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started by Swami Vivekananda in 1896

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Literature, Culture, Spirituality

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THE ROAD TO WISDOM



Swami Vivekananda on *LANGUAGE*

Idea—the origin of language

Every idea that you have in the mind has a counterpart in a word; the word and the thought are inseparable. The external part of one and the same thing is what we call word, and the internal part is what we call thought. No man can, by analysis, separate thought from word. The idea that language was created by men—certain men sitting together and deciding upon words, has been proved to be wrong. So long as man has existed there have been words and language. What is the connection between an idea and a word? Although we see that there must always be a word with a thought, it is not necessary that the same thought requires the same word. The thought may be the same in twenty different countries, yet the language is different. We must have a word to express each thought, but these words need not necessarily have the same sound. Sounds will vary in different nations. ... These sounds vary, yet the relation between the sounds and the thoughts is a natural one. The connection between thoughts and sounds is good only if there be a real connection between the thing signified and the symbol; until then that symbol will never come into general use. A symbol is the manifester of the thing signified, and if the thing signified has already an existence, and if, by experience, we know that the symbol has expressed that thing many times, then we are sure that there is a real relation between them. Even if the things are not present, there will be thousands who will know them by their symbols. There must be a natural connection between the symbol and the thing signified; then, when that symbol is pronounced, it recalls the thing signified.

Sanskrit—The prestige of India

Do not seize every opportunity of fighting the Brahmin, because, as I have shown, you are suffering from your own fault. Who told you to neglect spirituality and Sanskrit learning? What have you been doing all this time? Why have you been indifferent? Why do you now fret and fume because somebody else had more brains, more energy, more pluck and go, than you? Instead of wasting your energies in vain discussions and quarrels in the newspapers, instead of fighting and quarrelling in your own homes—which is sinful—use all your energies in acquiring the culture which the Brahmin has, and the thing is done. Why do you not become Sanskrit scholars? Why do you not spend millions to bring Sanskrit education to all the castes of India? That is the question. The moment you do these things, you are equal to the Brahmin. That is the secret of power in India. ...Sanskrit and prestige go together in India. As soon as you have that, none dares say anything against you. That is the one secret; take that up.

From *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 1.217-219; 3.228-229

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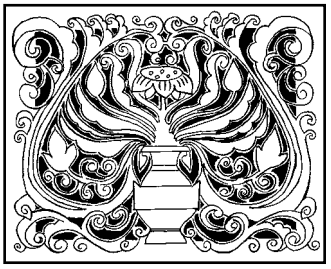
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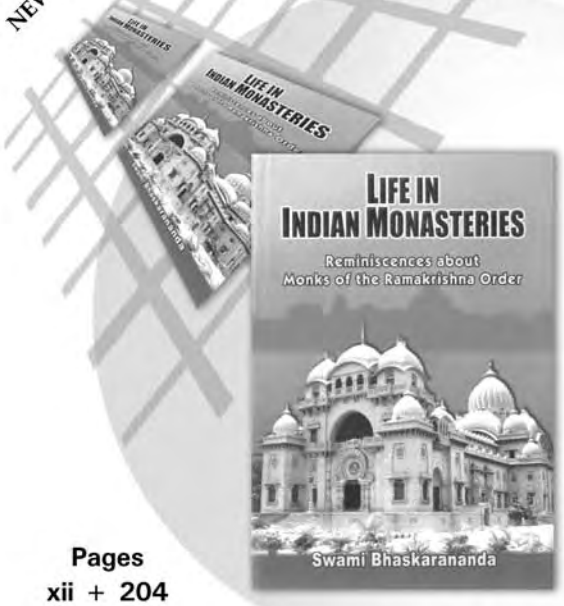
— *Sri Sarada Devi*

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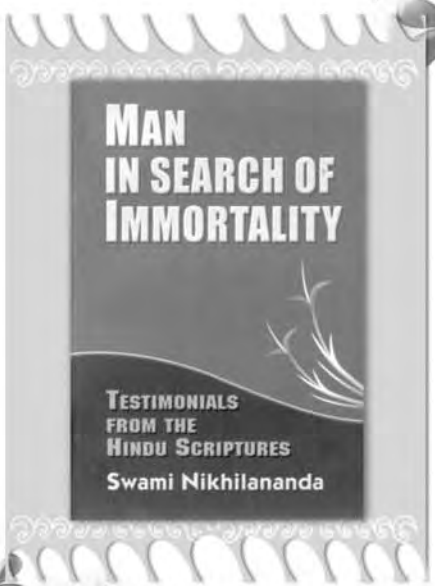
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We want to lead mankind to the place where there is neither the Vedas, nor the Bible, nor the Koran; yet this has to be done by harmonising the Vedas, the Bible and the Koran.

Mankind ought to be taught that religions are but the varied expressions of THE RELIGION, which is Oneness, so that each may choose that path that suits him best.

— Swami Vivekananda

ABP

Traditional Wisdom

उत्तिष्ठत जाग्रत प्राप्य वरान्निबोधत । *Arise! Awake! And stop not till the goal is reached!*

Vak: The Word

July 2009
Vol. 114, No. 7

बृहस्पते प्रथमं वाचो अग्रं यत् प्रैरत नामधेयं दधानाः ।
यदेषां श्रेष्ठं यदरिप्रमासीत् प्रेणा तदेषां निहितं गुहाविः ॥

When seers, O Brihaspati, giving names to objects, sent out Vak's first and earliest utterances, all that was excellent and spotless, treasured within them, was revealed by the power of their love.

(Rig Veda, 10.71. 1)

अनादिनिधनं ब्रह्म शब्दतत्त्वं यदक्षरम् ।
विवर्ततेऽर्थभावेन प्रक्रिया जगतो यतः ॥

The imperishable Word that is Brahman, without beginning or end, evolves into the object of connotation, from which originates the process of the world.

(*Vakyapadiya*, 'Brahma Kanda', 1)

नृत्तावसाने नटराजराजो ननाद ढक्कां नवपञ्चवारम् ।
उद्धर्त्तुकामः सनकादिसिद्धान् एतद्विमर्षे शिवसूत्रजालम् ॥

Wishing to liberate seers like Sanaka, (Shiva), the best among the king of dancers, struck his drum nine and five times at the end of his (cosmic) dance; this I know as the network of Shiva-sutras (the basis of Sanskrit grammar).

Ramaṇīyākṣa-sarākṛtin polucu varṇa-śreṇi vīṇānulāpamucetan karagiñciy andu nija-bimbamb'oppan acchāmṛtatvamun'ātma-pratipādakatvamunu tad-varṇāḷiy and'ella pūrṇamu kāviñcina vāṇi tirmala-mahā-rāyokti polcun kṛpan.

Playing the vina, she melts down the string of syllables she holds, so that each contains her image, and each, eternal and transparent, is also full of self. This goddess, this language, lives in the words of our king

(*Vasu-caritramu*, 1.4, cited in *Classical Telugu Poetry*, 52)

THIS MONTH

Language, Literature, and Culture are closely related entities that beget, influence, and foster each other. With eighteen scheduled languages and hundreds of dialects, India is home to an amazing linguistic and cultural variety. With this number we inaugurate a series that looks at the spiritual and cultural elements underpinning this diversity.



Modern Hindi literature has gone through several distinct phases of evolutionary change during the last hundred and fifty years of its existence. Prof. Awadhesh Pradhan, Department of Hindi, Banaras Hindu University, surveys these developments and the key figures and ideas underlying them in **The Spiritual and Cultural Ethos of Modern Hindi Literature**.

In **Achievements of Hindi Historical Novels** Dr Narendra Kohli examines the place of historical and biographical novels in Hindi literature against the background of Indian history and the roles that these works have played therein. The author is a reputed littérateur whose biographical novel on Swami Vivekananda, *Toro Kara Toro*, has received wide critical acclaim.

Dr Prema Nandakumar, reputed researcher and literary critic from Srirangam, tells us how the **People's Poet: Subramania Bharati** holds a unique position in Tamil literary tradition as well as in the Indian spiritual and cultural horizon through his literary versatility, devotion, and patriotism.

Krishnadeva Raya's is a distinctive voice in the domain of Telugu literature: 'He sees the world differently from any earlier poet, with an extraordinary sweep and magnanimity of vision.' His vision transcends linguistic, territorial, and cultural boundaries. These features are evident in his *Amuktamalyada*, which Dr R V S Sundaram, Former Director, Institute of Kannada Studies, University of Mysore, discusses in **Culture and Spirituality in Krishnadeva Raya's *Amuktamalyada***.



Janice Thorup looks at some of the literary milestones that mark the initiatives and struggles of the American people in their quest for freedom, justice, and equality in **Spirituality in American Literature**. The author is a writer and social worker from St Louis.

Swami Ranganathananda, the thirteenth president of the Ramakrishna Order, concludes his discourse on **Ecstasy in Daily Life** by telling us about the nature of genuine spiritual ecstasy and how it can be cultivated through bhakti, the natural spiritual love that can leaven all our relations.

Dr M Sivaramkrishna, former Head, Department of English, Osmania University, Hyderabad, is reminded of Sri Ramakrishna's living presence as he browses through texts on Hinduism and world religions for his eighth presentation on **The Many-splendoured Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Vedanta**.

In the ninth instalment of **Narada Bhakti Sutra** Swami Bhaskareswarananda, former President, Ramakrishna Math, Nagpur, discusses why unalloyed bhakti is a sure path to God.

EDITORIAL

Language, Literature, and Culture

The years between 1880 and 1920 saw a revolution in the contemporary scholarly understanding of the antiquity of Tamil literature. This was the period when ancient Tamil poetry of the Sangam age was brought to wider light through the untiring efforts of C W Damodaram Pillai and U V Swaminatha Aiyar. This pushed the history of Tamil literature well beyond the common era and opened up a vision of a people 'who were adventurous and heroic; who roamed the high seas in pursuit of gold and glory; who were "hospitable and tolerant in religion", "egalitarian" and "rationalist", fun-loving but contemplative and philosophical as well'.

Swaminatha Aiyar exemplifies the scholar totally devoted to language and literature; and Tamil was the sole object of his adoration. Sumathi Ramaswamy observes:

> Frequently relying on word-of-mouth information about manuscript collections in remote villages, he would walk for miles down country roads, sometimes riding bullock carts which broke down, at other times taking trains. On these trips—the equivalent of other people's holy pilgrimages—he would sometimes encounter wonderful people who filled him with awe and joy because of their obvious reverence for Tamil, and because of the care with which they had maintained old Tamil manuscripts. ...
>
> With the acquisition of the desired manuscripts, the battle had only barely begun. ... There were also the challenges of printing. ... Above all, there were financial problems. Publication of these works demanded enormous outlays of money, far in excess of his modest income as a college teacher. ... On more than one occasion, he had to borrow money to keep the printing process going.

One person who provided wholehearted support to Swaminatha Aiyar was Pandithurai Thevar, the founder-patron of the Madurai Tamil Sangam, which viewed itself as the fourth Sangam in line with the three ancient academies that had flourished under the Pandya kings of Madurai. Pandithurai, along with his cousin Bhaskara Setupati, the raja of Ramanathapuram—who was a disciple and a staunch supporter of Swami Vivekananda—extended liberal patronage to Tamil learning, research, and publications.

The eight Sangam anthologies—totalling over 2,300 poems—are not religious literature per se. They deal with 'the interior' (*akam*) and 'exterior' (*puram*) worlds. The former is woven into 'highly structured love poems' that highlight emotive associations of the Tamil landscape. The *puram* poetry, in contrast, deals with a world 'where warriors are acclaimed for their valour, kings are praised for their generosity, and poets instruct their patrons in right action and the nature of life ... in bold, clear strokes'. The Sangam compositions—the rules of which were clearly laid out by the *Tolkappiyam*, one of the oldest texts on grammar and rhetoric—depend on 'a taxonomy of Tamil nature and culture, of culturally defined time, space, nature, and human nature'. Their highly structured and symbolic form sets these poems apart from other classical works: 'For some five or six generations, the Sangam poets spoke this common language of symbols, creating a body of lyrical poetry probably unequalled in passion, maturity, and delicacy by anything in any Indian literature.'

Though the Sangam poems are largely non-religious—the seventy religious poems of the *Paripadal* being a notable exception—they could lend themselves to a religious interpretation. The *Tolkappiyam* tells us that 'the gods who preside over the

mountains, forest, seashore, riverine tract, and arid land are, respectively, Ceyon, "the Red One", Mayon, "the Dark One", Varunan, the god of the sea and wind, Ventan, "the King", and Korravai, goddess of war'.

Given the above associations, it is not surprising that the founding of the Madurai Tamil Sangam in 1901 was followed, within twenty years, by the establishment of the Shaiva Siddhanta Kazhagam, 'perhaps the largest publishing house devoted to printing ancient Tamil literary and religious books'. Beside publishing 'almost every major work in Tamil and Shaiva literature, as well as several minor and hitherto unknown ones', the Kazhagam has also been supporting various educational institutions and Tamil libraries and has convened 'numerous public conferences on various aspects of Shaiva and Tamil literature, on the creation of Tamil technical terms, on Tamil Nadu history, and the like'.

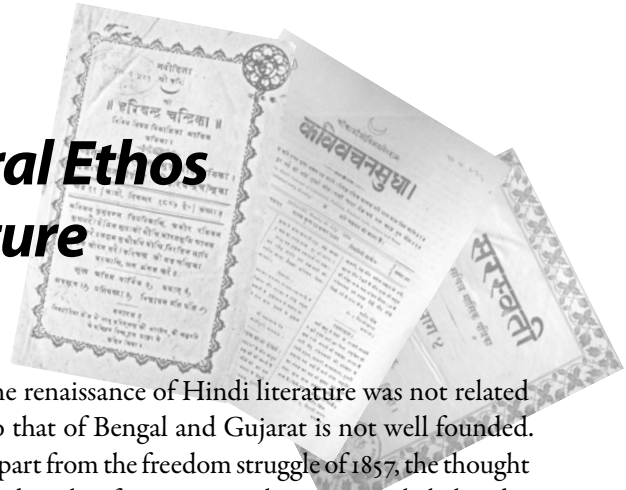
A more radical outcome of the modern revival of interest in Tamil was the development of an ethnolinguistic political awareness that culminated in the formation of Tamil Nadu and the emergence of political groups invoking Dravidian and Tamil nationalism. The linguistic organization of Indian states had been a cause of concern to many in the immediate aftermath of India's partition. Even Mahatma Gandhi, 'a consistent advocate of states based on language', was worried about divisive elements sabotaging the forces of national unification.

That these fears have remained largely unfounded till now highlights the cultural unity underlying the linguistic variety of India. Conflicts have arisen when the value and strength of this variety is not appreciated and encouraged. In 1965 the central government's decision to enforce the use of Hindi as the official national language of India, even in states where Hindi-speakers were in a small minority, evoked especially vehement protests from the people of Tamil Nadu. To Tamilians the move smacked of linguistic imperialism, especially when people in Hindi-speaking areas showed little inclination towards learning Dravidian languages. Acquiescence in the imposition of Hindi would also have placed many people who did not know Hindi at a disadvantage in the public sphere. The protests, however, had more to do with the cultural and linguistic consciousness of a people who boasted of a language with one of the oldest unbroken literary traditions. A similar pride in the Bengali language led to protests in West Bengal, despite the numerous affinities that exist between the Bengali and Hindi languages and cultures.

That overly zealous linguistic protectionism is not necessary for the preservation of one's cultural identity is evidenced by Kerala, which has high literacy rates in both Malayalam and Hindi as well as a distinct cultural identity. Swaminatha Aiyar had articulated his passionate love for Tamil: 'Contrary to everyone's desires, from the time I was a young man, my mind was immersed in the beauties of the goddess Tamil (*tamilt-teyvam*). More and more, it yearned for Tamilttay's [Mother Tamil's] auspicious grace (*tiruvarul*).' But there was also a negative side to this devotion: 'Sanskrit, Telugu, English—none of these held my interest. I even felt a deep aversion towards them.'

That a free mind, confident of its own strength, need not harbour any such antagonism is attested to by Krishnadeva Raya. Though largely a king of Kannada territory, he was devoted to the deities in Tamil land and to such Tamil saints as Andal; he also penned exquisite compositions in Sanskrit and Telugu. Mahatma Gandhi took great pains to study Tamil and Swami Vivekananda to master French when they were called upon to communicate in these languages. Swami Vivekananda had expressed appreciation of Pandit D Savariroyan's article on 'Admixture of the Aryan with Tamilian', published in *The Light of Truth or Siddhanta Deepika,* and his assertion of the Akkado-Sumerian identity of ancient Tamilians. 'This makes us proud,' Swamiji said, 'of the blood of the great civilization which flowered before all others—compared to whose antiquity the Aryans and the Semites are babies.' If we refuse to partake of and participate in this global linguistic and cultural diversity, we shall only be refusing our own heritage.

The Spiritual and Cultural Ethos of Modern Hindi Literature



Prof. Awadhesh Pradhan

BHARATENDU HARISHCHANDRA, the father of modern Hindi literature, was seven when the first war for independence from British rule broke out in the Hindi-speaking regions of North India in 1857. This uprising converted the villages and towns in the Hindi regions into a zone of resistance to foreign rule for nearly two and a half years. Even today people laud the valour of the heroes of this freedom struggle: Vir Kunwar Singh of Bhojpur, Rani Lakshmibai of Jhansi, Rana Benimadhav of Baiswada, and Raja Devi Bakhsh of Gonda. There is hardly any Hindi-speaking area where tales of this independence struggle and its ruthless suppression by the British are not extant. The reputed literary critic Ramvilas Sharma calls this struggle the first storey of the edifice of renascent Hindi. The second, according to him, is the great literary awakening ushered in under Bharatendu's leadership.

As opposed to anonymous rural poets who could freely express themselves through folk song and poetry, the elitist Bharatendu and his associates could not openly voice their feelings for fear of the British. That is why we hardly find any mention of the freedom struggle of 1857 in their writings; and when mentioned, it is only by way of condemnation. All the same, Dr Ramvilas Sharma believes that this struggle and the literature of Bharatendu's time are interrelated on two counts. First, the writers of this era built upon the criticism of the British rule—the famines, the annihilation of farmers and craftsmen, and similar topics—and the emphasis placed in the mutiny records on the development of indigenous industries. Second, there is a deep impress of the farmer's life on the Bharatendu-era literature, much like the significant role that farmers played in the 1857 uprising. But Dr Sharma's attempt to prove that the renaissance of Hindi literature was not related to that of Bengal and Gujarat is not well founded. Apart from the freedom struggle of 1857, the thought and works of Raja Rammohan Roy, Keshabchandra Sen, and Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar—all from Bengal—had a great influence on the writings of Bharatendu and his associates, as did the philosophy and works of Dayananda Saraswati and his Arya Samaj. There is little evidence to doubt this.

The Bharatendu Era

Bharatendu's ancestors were landlords in Bengal and he had family ties with the province. It was during his pilgrimage to Puri at the age of fifteen that Bharatendu experienced the influence of the Bengal cultural renaissance. In his *Hindi Sahitya ka Itihas* (History of Hindi Literature) Acharya Ramchandra Shukla writes: 'In 1865 he [Bharatendu] went to the Jagannath temple with his family. On that trip he got acquainted with the new developments in Bengali literature. He noticed the new genres of social, historical, and Puranic plays and novels based on the cultures of India and other countries and felt the lack of such literature in Hindi. In 1868 he published the Hindi translation of the Bengali drama *Vidyasundar*. This translation provided glimpses of an elegant form of Hindi prose.'

The Bengal influence was not limited to literary creations. Bharatendu had personal relations with contemporary Bengali thinkers like Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar. While editing the text of *Abhijnanashakuntala*, Vidyasagar made use of Bharatendu's library. Babu Navinchandra Rai, an officer of the education department interested in promotion of Hindi, brought out several Hindi periodicals from Lahore to propagate the teachings of the Brahmo Samaj.



Bharatendu Harishchandra

Bharatendu's close associate Radhacharan Goswami was also influenced by the Brahmo Samaj. As for the influence of Swami Dayananda and his Arya Samaj, suffice it to say that if any reformer significantly influenced nineteenth-century Hindi society, it was Dayananda. It was impossible for a conscientious person to be oblivious of the cyclonic campaign that he launched against Sanatana Dharma in Punjab and in the Hindi belt. None can deny his deep influence on Hindi society and literature. Despite being opposed to Dayananda's thought, Bharatendu listed him as one of the editors of his paper *Kavi Vachan Sudha*. Again, it was Pandit Bhimsen Sharma, one of the most forceful speakers and writers of the Bharatendu era, who took down Swami Dayananda's dictation of the *Satyarth Prakash*.

In sum, just as the modern revival of Hindi society and literature was influenced by the freedom struggle of 1857 and the political movements of the Congress in the Tilak-Gandhi era, it was also inspired by the Bengal renaissance leaders, from Rammohan Roy to Ramakrishna-Vivekananda, by Swami Dayananda and his Arya Samaj, and by the Prarthana Samaj of Maharashtra. Though, at first glance, social and political issues seem to be the primary focus of modern Hindi literature, the cultural and spiritual dimensions of the modern Indian revival have also been persistently active in this literary tradition.

The first Hindi newspaper *Udant Martand* was brought out from Calcutta in 1826; it was followed by *Banaras Akhbar* in 1845. Bharatendu published several periodicals, including *Kavi Vachan Sudha* (est. 1868)and *Harishchandra Magazine* (est. 1873), which was later rechristened *Harishchandra Chandrika*. Soon a whole network of newspapers was laid over the towns and cities between Lahore and Calcutta. Primacy of prose was the major result of this demand for journalism in the new era. This was a big cultural change. The writers of the Bharatendu era started writing essays, plays, stories, satire, and travelogues on a host of topics, including the social conditions prevailing in the country and the need for social reform. The suffering arising out of British rule inspired a recapture of the glories of ancient Indian history. The title page of the *Harishchandra Magazine* announced: 'A monthly journal published in connection with the *Kavi Vachan Sudha* containing articles on literary, scientific, political and religious subjects, antiquities, reviews, dramas, history, novels, poetical selections, gossip, humour, and wit.' This description not only gives an idea of the keenness and diversity of the late nineteenth-century literature, it also suggests that, unlike the disillusionment with religion that accompanied the European Enlightenment, the Indian renaissance tried to harmonize the domains of science and religion. That is why, while on the one hand Indian writers provided fresh commentaries on religion and spirituality, they also wrote about developments in history, archaeology, sociology, and science on the other. Instead of an uncompromising war between tradition and modernity we have here the sweet music of concord between these two forces.

Though Bharatendu had inherited the Vallabha Vaishnava faith, his writings reflect the best liberal traditions of bhakti poetry as well as the spirit of the modern era. While most of his poems are devoted to Krishna, one of his anthologies, *Jain Kautuhal* (Jain Inquiry), is based on Jain thought. He wrote the biographies of Kalidas, Ramanujacharya,

Shankaracharya, Jaydev, Pushpadantacharya, Vallabhacharya, and Surdas, and lauded Akbar's liberality over Aurangzeb's bigotry. He dwelt on the glories of the festive months of Kartik, Margashirsh, Magh, Purushottam, and Vaishakh. In *Panch Pavitratma* (Five Pure Souls) he recorded the biographies of the five holy personalities of Islam—Prophet Muhammad, Bibi Fatima, Hazrat Ali, and the Imams Hasan and Hussain. He also started translating the Quran into Hindi. In his conclusion to the biography of Prophet Muhammad, he wrote: 'Glory to you! The trusted servant of God, Muhammad! Today, millions of Muslims from Asia, Europe, and Africa are bonded by the name of Muhammad, the obedient and faithful servant of the Lord, and the monotheistic religion of Islam that he preached. So wonderful is this religious bond he established on earth that none is capable of breaking it today.' This statement in praise of Prophet Muhammad—who preached an uncompromisingly monotheistic religion and refused to attribute any form to God—from the pen of an initiated Vaishnava and a steadfast devotee of the famous Gopal Mandir is the best example of the catholicity of the Vaishnavism practised by Bharatendu.

In 1879 Bharatendu started writing an article titled 'Ishu Khrista aur Isha Krishna' (Jesus Christ and Lord Krishna), in which he ventured into a comparative analysis to prove that 'all the religious teachers of the world have tried to shape their ideals, gods, scriptures, theologies, and their own character in the light of the Indian tradition'. He believed that the word 'god' was derived from *gautam*: 'This is another word for *gautam*. In the nations of the north, *gautam* is called *godma* and this is how the word "god" came into being.' He compared the biblical book of Genesis and the fall from heaven in Milton's *Paradise Lost: Fifth Book* with the process of Creation as explained by Manu. Noting the similarities between Minerva and Durga, he wrote: 'Minerva is born of the shoulders of [her father] Indra [Tinia]; and here Durga emerged out of the gods. Minerva appeared bearing all weapons as did Durga; Minerva is the goddesses of war, so is Durga. ... Both have the lion as their vehicle. Minerva has a spear in one hand and the head of Medus in the other (the word *medus* might have been derived from *madhu* or *mahish* [the demon that fought Durga]). Durga too is conceived in a similar form. In her other form, Minerva wears a crown of severed heads and has snakes coiled around; so does Durga. Minerva loves roosters; here cocks are sacrificed to the Devi.' In the same way, he drew parallels between Apollo and Krishna. He also considered 'Gabriel (*gibrail*)' to be derived from *garuda*: Garuda is the best companion (*parshad*) of Lord Vishnu, and Gibrail is the best of angels (*farishta*). The Persian *farishta* is a corruption of the Sanskrit *parshada*, according to Bharatendu. Citing Max Müller, Bharatendu tells us that the stories of *Panchatantra* and *Hitopadesha* are extant in various forms in Europe even today. Bharatendu seems to have read the works of contemporary Indologists and was conversant with their theories. That may be the reason for his interest in the study and critical analysis of the historical development of religion and worship, of gods and legends. In his essay 'Vaishnavta aur Bharatvarsh' (Vaishnavism and India) he traces the evolution of Vishnu from Surya, the sun god: 'First the sun appeared to be the most extraordinary and benevolent entity to inhabitants of the earth; this led to deification of the sun. This concept of the deity led to the conceptualization of the divine Narayana inside the physical orb of the sun. Finally, it was announced that Narayana was not only residing in the sun but was all-pervading, and the countless millions of suns, moons, and stars were shining out of the light of Narayana. Thus, people started worshipping the spiritual Narayana.'

Bharatendu's Vaishnavism

Bharatendu considers Vaishnavism to be the oldest creed of India, and bhakti to be the royal road of religion across the globe. He believes that human interest proceeds from rituals to knowledge, and from knowledge to worship. That is why worship is given primacy in all religions. Since the path of worship is most developed in Vaishnavism, for Bharatendu this

alone is the natural religion of India: 'The Vaishnava creed is the creed of India and it has merged into the very blood and bones of India.' Bharatendu cites several proofs in support of this statement: that the paths of Kabir, Dadu, the Sikhs, the Baul, and the like are but offshoots of Vaishnavism; all incarnations are derived from Vishnu; even the names of people and places in India are largely those of Vishnu or his incarnations; he is at the centre of such epics as the Ramayana and the Mahabharata as well as the Puranas; the bulk of Indian literature is focused on him; the piety and pilgrimage, fairs and festivals of India are related to Vishnu in the main; and so on.

Though effusive in his praise of Vaishnavism, Bharatendu does not shut his eyes to its then state of decline. He criticizes the ostentation, discrimination, and the guru cult pervading Vaishnavism: 'Nowadays Vaishnavism is so conflict-ridden that members of one Vaishnava sect do not dine with members of other sects or allow them to enter their temples. This has led to the absurd situation of "nine fireplaces for the seven men from Kanauj". The present condition is a sure sign of the degradation of Vaishnavism. Now things will get better only when there is a reduction in pomp and increase in unity among its followers, and sincere devotion and worship is developed. ... This will be possible only if the goswamis give up their rajasic and tamasic habits. ... The days when even fallen gurus were revered are gone. ... Now the gurus and goswamis ought to have such character as would spontaneously attract the respect of others' minds. ... I also suggest, with some trepidation, that religious fasts and baths should be so performed as not to cause excessive physical suffering. ... Giving up external show, let us preach elevated internal devotion alone; then we shall find how the name of Hari echoes in all directions, how even the votaries of alien religions bow down to it, and how the various sects of Hinduism like the Sikhs and the followers of Kabir mingle freely in this elevated society, forgetting their mutual dissension.' Cultivation of sincere love in place of ritualism, and universal humanism, unity, and liberality in place of communal discord—these were the teachings that Bharatendu imbibed from the highest ideals of the bhakti movement and bhakti poetry.

Bharatendu considered the sects of Kabir, Dadu, the Sikhs, and the Baul to be constituents of Vaishnavism. He believed that dos, don'ts, and rituals are only secondary aspects of different religions, and that giving undue importance to these has diverted the general public from religion proper. People held on to rituals, leaving God aside—this was the cause of the then decline. Bharatendu wrote lucid Hindi expositions of the *Narada Bhakti Sutra* and the *Shandilya Bhakti Sutra* with the purpose of disseminating the true essence of religion. In 'Tadiya Sarvasva', the preface to his commentary on the *Narada Bhakti Sutra*, he writes: 'Secondary works turned more important and the essence became secondary. This is the reason why India turned away from God and became fragmented; this is the main cause of its decline. Has any irreligious country ever developed? Alas! Our religion has become so thin and weak that it breaks at the slightest touch. Our religion is now like a rotten thread.' Upholding devotion as the common treasure of all religions, countries, and races, he writes: 'Let the lovers of foreign religions like Christianity understand that Krishna is the name of their formless God; Krishna indeed is the ideal of the Vaishnavas; let the Shaivites say that Vishnu is another name for Shiva; let the Brahmos know that Brahman alone is called Hari; let the followers of Arya Samaj consider it as their ideal; let the Sikhs find their path here; and let all the devotees of the world know it to be their own.' This is the mental plane from which the modern understanding of religious harmony has developed.

Dayananda and Shraddharam

To Dayananda neither image worship nor the theory of incarnation was acceptable, nor any religion other than his own. In the thirteenth and fourteenth chapters of his *Satyarth Prakash*, he refuted the principles of Christianity and Islam. Moreover, in the twelfth chapter he denounced Buddhism and Jainism along with the Charvaks, and in the eleventh he refuted the tenets of Vaishnavism, Shaivism, Shaktism,

Tantra, and the bhakti sects and traditions. He accepted the Vedas and their auxiliaries, the *Brahma Sutra*, the yoga philosophy, the twelve Upanishads, the *Manu Smriti*, the *Ashtadhyayi* of Panini, and the *Mahabhashya* of Patanjali, and rejected the entire remaining corpus of Indian literature as inauthentic.

No liberal Indian could have accepted this stand, much less Bharatendu. He considered the entire body of traditional Indian literature as his very own. In one of his essays he recorded nine meanings of the mantra '*Chatvari shringa*' as given by different acharyas, and concluded: 'None of the meanings derived from the Shruti will be inauthentic.' Bharatendu posed sixty-four questions to Swami Dayananda in the style of scriptural debate and had them published as a book. In his satirical essay 'Swarg mein Vichar Sabha' (Seminar in Heaven), he pictured the existence of two groups of thinkers in heaven. On one side were the conservatives, comprising the seers and sages of old who reached heaven by emaciating their bodies through tapsaya; the other group was that of the liberals who preached catholic ideas while on earth and performed acts of service and charity. Swami Dayananda, Keshabchandra Sen, Chaitanya, Kabir, Nanak, and Dadu fall in this group. One faction was of the opinion that Dayananda and Keshabchandra Sen ought to get a high place in heaven; the other was totally against this. To solve this issue God formed a select committee which, while appreciating the social welfare activities of both, held Keshabchandra Sen's broad devotional path to be superior to Dayananda's narrow attitude. It is clear from this essay that Bharatendu's affections were more with the liberals—and among them, more with Keshabchandra Sen—than with Swami Dayananda.

Shraddharam Phillauri, the famous Punjabi speaker and writer of the Bharatendu era, was a proponent of the *varnashrama dharma*. In 1863 he prevented, through his eloquence, Raja Ranvir Singh of Kapurthala from being converted to Christianity. He gave religious discourses all over Punjab and trained many preachers. Besides writing in Hindi, he also wrote many religious books in Punjabi and Urdu; his works include *Satyamritapravah* (Flow of the Nectar of Truth), *Tattvadipak* (Lamp of Reality), *Atmachikitsa* (Self-treatment), *Dharmaraksha* (Preservation of Dharma), and *Upadesh Sangrah* (Collected Instructions). He nonchalantly rebutted many of Swami Dayananda's precepts. Though a strong supporter of Sanatana Dharma, he was critical of all superstitions to such a degree that some labelled him an atheist. However, 'Punjabi Hindus considered him a pillar of dharma'.



Balkrishna Bhatt

Pandit Balkrishna Bhatt, another important associate of Bharatendu, was an extraordinary Sanskrit scholar. In a remarkable essay he wrote that while Shankaracharya demolished the Buddhists and established the doctrine of Brahman, Guru Nanak gave birth to the organized society of Sikhs through his revolutionary thought. Like Bharatendu, he too extolled the revolutionary humanistic tradition of bhakti. The debate between the Dayananda and the Sanatana Dharma camps had a deep impact on the religious and cultural ethos of the Bharatendu era. Pandit Bhimsen Sharma was an enthusiastic propagator of Swami Dayananda's views and Pandit Ambikadutt Vyas was an exponent of Sanatana Dharma. In his book *Avatar Mimamsa* (Reflection on the Incarnation) Vyas established the principles of incarnation and image worship.

(*To be concluded*)

Achievements of Hindi Historical Novels

Dr Narendra Kohli



Bundelkhand

We are aware of the difference between history, the historical novel, the historical romance, and pseudo-historical literature; but what exactly is the aim of the historical novel? Could it have an end other than that of the novel? I feel that the process of creation of the historical novel is indeed different, though its goal can never be different from that of the novel or, for that matter, literature itself. Literary experts and psychologists ought to explore the differences in the process of creation. What exactly was the reason for Premchand and Jaishankar Prasad writing in two different signature styles while living in the same city at the same time? Nanddularey Vajpeyi contended that what you read in the newspapers of today could be read again in Premchand's stories of tomorrow; and Premchand was saying that Jaishankar Prasad was merely 'digging up old corpses'.

The Historical Novel

The portrayal of any period of history could be termed a 'historical novel'. *Rangbhumi* (Arena), *Bund aur Samudra* (The Drop and the Sea), *Jhutha Sach* (False Truth), and *Uttar Katha* (Epilogue) could qualify as historical novels due to their authentic depictions of the eras they deal with. However, there is an essential prerequisite for a novel to be termed 'historical'—it should be based on a popular event, an event readers are already familiar with.

We take the Puranas to be the record of ancient Indian history; but a group of scholars working on foreign principles considers them as myth or fiction, and hence not history. Consequently, Puranic novels have become a class different from historical novels. Though I consider Puranas to be the history of my society, still I would prefer that Puranic novels remain separate from historical novels. Why? Because Puranic novels are not mere accounts of the events of a particular period, they have an inherent value system. They present the principles of the Upanishads through Puranic characters in the form of a novel. Novels based on the incidents, personalities, and time period of the Puranas but not supporting their value system ought not to be called Puranic novels. Most of these novels are written either by persons unaware of the Puranic value system or by opponents out to destroy these values.

The ambit of the historical novel is also very wide. Therefore, historical novels and their authors have been variously assessed on the basis of differences in belief, taste, and ways of thinking. The historical and life-oriented stories of Premchand and

earlier writers were successful in reminding society of its glory and strength. But Premchand's life was short. How many people remember his *Harisingh Nalwa*? Today he is of mere historical interest.

Vrindavanlal Varma · This author lists some reasons, both general and specific, for his turning to writing historical novels. He admits that reading the works of Sir Walter Scott inspired him to write similar novels based on the glorious pages of Indian history and, in doing so, re-establish Indian prestige. There was also a special reason, which he explains by citing an incident. Varma was invited to a marriage ceremony in a Punjabi family living in Bundelkhand. Many relations and acquaintances of the Punjabi family were present there. He happened to hear the conversations in which the visitors were discussing the poverty, backwardness, and illiteracy of Bundelkhand in a rather insulting way. Varma agreed that he was badly offended and resolved then and there to write novels to assert the glory of Bundelkhand.

He researched, to the best of his ability, the period of history that he chose for his work, gathered evidence to support his statements, and also created a bit of historical romance. His subject was limited to Bundelkhand. But one who loves his homeland loves his culture as well. Indeed, it is history and geography that create culture. He wrote such historical romances as *Virata ki Padmini* (Padmini of Virata) and *Gadh Kundar* (Kundar Fort), novels like *Jhansi ki Rani* (The Queen of Jhansi), loaded with history, and also balanced novels like *Mrignayani* (Doe-eyed). His stand was very clear: an author cannot be independent of his times. Vrindavanlal Varma had his own theme. He was fighting a battle with his pen—his work was a struggle. He was trying to present his country at its best, and was also raising the morale of his people.

During the days of his itinerancy across India, Swami Vivekananda told his disciples at Alwar that, till then, Indian history had been written only by foreigners: Indian history is disorganized. Its chronology is neither accurate nor true. The history written by the English and other writers is only meant to break our wills. They can only weaken us. They tell us our faults alone. How can those foreigners who understand little of our manners and customs, our religion and philosophy write faithful and unbiased histories of India? That is why many false notions have made their way into them. Now it is up to us to strike an independent path; to study our ancient texts; to carry out researches, and write accurate, true, sympathetic, and soul-inspiring history.

Chatursen Shastri and Rangeya Raghav · Acharya Chatursen Shastri has similar views about his own writings. He says that after reading Kanhaiyalal Maniklal Munshi's novel *Jai Somnath* he had the desire to outdo Munshi, and went on to write his own novel *Somnath*. In the preface to *Vayam Rakshamah* (We Defend), he accepts that he has found some new facts which he is 'throwing into the reader's face'. Consequently, in its effort to surpass *Jai Somnath*, *Somnath* became a hugely incredible and sensational novel. In his eagerness to flaunt his knowledge and newly researched facts, Shastri went on filling *Vayam Rakshamah* and *Sona aur Khun* (Gold and Blood) with page after page of unnecessary and exaggerated details, defying all norms of writing a novel. These works do not have the aim that could earn them literary acclaim or help them earn a lasting place in either the national or social memory, and the lack of a definite theme or thesis has only helped him in his digressions.

While writing *Sona aur Khun*, Chatursen Shastri seems to have got so carried away by historical details that he forgot completely he was writing a novel; hence he went on writing hundreds of pages of history. This hurt the element of novel, for the historical novel is not mere history. Historical novels like *Vaishali ki Nagarvadhu* (The Courtesan of Vaishali) could have been written with the aim of generating a special ambience; it cannot be denied, however, that many see the helplessness and suffering of women in this novel. The Buddhist period of history has always attracted writers through its numerous possibilities. Many great works in Hindi revolve around the characters of Mahatma Buddha,

Amrapali, Simha Senapati, and Ajatashatru. Be it the depiction of vulnerability of women, discussion of the evolution and form of republics, narration of maternal affection, or the search for similarities with Marxism, the truth is that this historical setting is incredibly exciting on many counts.

Rangeya Raghav also has a long list of historical novels to his credit. He has even written novels on the prehistoric era, a period of time on which we have little objective historical data. In *Murdon ka Tila* (Hillock of Corpses), he presents an imaginary account of prehistoric times and surmises the cause of the annihilation of a culture. But it is difficult to accept that a whole culture, which more recent archaeological excavations prove to have spanned from present-day Haryana to Gujarat, was wiped away by flood. A town or a city, at the most, may get drowned in a flood; sometimes, an earthquake may destroy a city, like Pompeii; but an entire civilization does not get destroyed by floods. Or was it some sort of small-scale *pralaya*, apocalypse? The fact is that the region depicted in the novel is known to have run out of water and not to have been deluged by it. All the same, such novels give us the delight of the writer's flight of imagination.

Hazariprasad Dwivedi • All of Hazariprasad Dwivedi's novels can be classified as historical or Puranic. They contain a unique portrayal of the times in which they are set. They are both authentic and attractive. However, Bhattini, the heroine of *Banabhatt ki Atmakatha* (Banabhatta's Autobiography), is not a historical character, though many incidents as well as the premises of the novel are dependent on this character. Therefore, this is a historical romance and not a historical novel. Nevertheless, as a novel, it is a rare work. *Charuchandralekh* and *Punarnava* are based on older literary pieces and popular folklore. *Anamdas ka Potha* (Anamdas's File) is written with the Upanishadic sage Raikva as its protagonist; hence, this is counted as a Puranic novel. But the writer has his own agenda: he is presenting permanent solutions to the problems of his time by linking them to problems that are universal as well as perennial.

This survey reinforces in my mind the belief that the relevance of the historical novel does not lie merely in an elegant and interesting depiction of a particular time and place. It merges its time period with the infinite and unfettered time, *kala*, and brings home a definite message. In the absence of a message no work can claim importance. Yashpal's *Divya* was written to set forth a principle, but there is no history in it, just a historical setting. It has a mere artistic semblance of history, much like Bhagavaticharan Varma's *Chitralekha*. These are not historical novels; they just create an imaginative illusion of history to present their views.

Biographical Novels

Biographies raise an important question of genre vis-à-vis the novel. A biography is a completely historical work, but it is not a novel. Rangeya Raghav has written numerous historical biographies, while staying very close to the style of the novel.

Amritlal Nagar has written many historical novels on subjects spanning across centuries of history, and each has its own special feature. However, three of his novels—*Ekda Naimisharanya* (Once in Naimisharnaya), *Manas ka Hans* (Swan of the Mind), and *Khanjan Nayan* (Restless Eyes)—require some explanation. *Ekda Naimisharanya* focuses on the issue of the writing of the Mahabharata. This novel is not related to the story of the Mahabharata and, therefore, is not a Puranic novel. It is only concerned with the time and authorship of the present version of the Mahabharata. This period is completely historical, though the characters may be taken to be imaginary. The protagonist of the novel is 'Mahabharat ka Punarlekhan' (Rewriting of the Mahabharata).

Manas ka Hans and *Khanjan Nayan* are novels written with two great Hindi poets—Tulsidas and Surdas—as their heroes. Though I do not discount the value of *Khanjan Nayan*, there is no denying the fact that it received neither critical appraisal nor popularity due to some of its complexities. *Manas ka Hans* is a unique novel in many respects. From the point of view of the time period in which

its hero Goswami Tulsidas lived, it is a historical novel, while from the perspective of Tulsidas's life, thought, spiritual practice, goal, and achievements, it does not appear to be different from a Puranic novel. The hero of this novel is a personality of Puranic dimensions. But though a Puranic character ought to be far and different from the ordinary person of today, Tulsi is a being whom we remember every day and whom we find very close. We can relate to him easily.

He is not born in Indra's Amaravati nor in the ashrama of a rishi. Instead, Tulsi is an unfortunate boy who is born when his village and country is facing trouble. War is on and power is being transferred. His mother dies and his father abandons him as being jinxed. The story of his childhood, based on the internal evidence of his works as well as circumstantial evidence, reveals that whoever tried to support Tulsi died soon after. Though there is nothing supernatural here, it does bring in the play of the Divine. One who has none else, has God for support. Tulsi too has only God as his support. This is similar to the tales of devotees in the Puranas—when one's ego melts totally and one surrenders fully to God, then God takes hold of them by the hand.

By his youth, Tulsi has already seen all the violence and selfishness that grips the world. There is hunger, there is nakedness. Bodies of men and women are sold in the market for the sake of food. Power is ruthless, wealth merciless, and religious centres are steeped in enjoyment and embroiled in jealousy and hatred. Like every devotee Tulsi asks God why this world is so hellish, if it truly were his creation.

There are the feminine charms of the teens; but Tulsi has neither the courage nor the endeavour to grab his love in violation of dharma. Next, there is the married life of youth and the struggles of a married life. There are the disputes between men and women; the views of the in-laws; the psyches of daughter, wife, and woman—and then the beginnings of dispassion: '*Antahin tohi tajenge pamar, jo na taje tu ab hi ten*; the evil ones will leave you in the end if you do not leave them now.' From now on Tulsi appears to be rising slightly above the ordinary run of people. This is not unnatural. The combination of a sensitive mind, dispassion, and a harsh wife leave a man with only two options—either become a slave to *kamini*, woman, or free oneself from *kama*, lust. If he were of baser stuff, he would have been a cringing slave to woman all his life; but how could a servant of Rama be a slave to kama.

The evolution of a poet has been portrayed very authentically through the life of Tulsidas. The creative mind became so identified with him as though it had become his slave to know and understand the process of creativity. The competition among writers and astrologers, the mutual conspiracy among scholars, the fight for money and fame—all these suggest that there was probably never a time when literature existed without the ingredients of jealousy and hatred.

There are obstacles in the spiritual path; and there are temptations too. Temptations confront a person in the form of sensuality or in the form of wealth. An aspirant in any field knows that, as one starts progressing, small achievements start acting as hurdles to obstruct further progress. If one gets entangled in these, one does not progress any further. By rejecting them one progresses to bigger achievements.

Freed from his personal relations, Tulsi becomes one with all members of society. Thus he sees and understands the sufferings of society. That is why he calls social service 'Rama's work'. He serves food and drink to the hungry murderer. He challenges casteism in the following words:

Dhut kaho avadhut kaho rajput kaho
jolha kaho kovu;
Kahu ki beti son beta na byahab
kahu ki jat bigari na sovu.

Let people call me a fraud or a sage; a Rajput or a weaver; I have no son to marry anyone's daughter and (thereby) defile his caste.

Here the relation between dispassion and the world becomes clear. There is a synthesis of the

world and Brahman; the relation between the monk and society is manifest. One is reminded of many utterances from Acharya Hazariprasad Dwivedi's *Anamdas ka Potha*. He says that austerity is performed in society, not in the forest. Tulsi is also overwhelmed by the agonies of society and engages himself in serving it. Renunciation of lust and greed alone form the road to progress. One cannot be free without giving up the desire for wealth and fame. It is for this reason that Tulsi considers desire for fame as being worse than craving for wealth and rejects the position of a *mansabdar*, an army chief in Akbar's court, offered by Abdur Rahim Khankhana.

There is no better merit, *punya*, than service to the suffering, and no vice like causing pain to others, *par pira sam nahi adhamai*. This spiritual principle has been recognized both by Vyasa and Tulsi. It clarifies the nature of renunciation and dispassion. Loving God's Creation in its entirety and serving it, knowing it to be Shiva, rising above selfish interests, giving up attachments, and relinquishing bodily ties is true dispassion. Dependence on God alone is renunciation. This is what ultimately leads the aspirant to God-realization.

Adoration of the bright elements of one's history is indeed adoration of one's culture. Tulsi presented the nectar of the entire Indian culture in the *Ramcharitmanas*. And with Tulsi as the protagonist of his story, Amritlal Nagar enlivened the struggle to imbibe and preserve one's culture amidst the cruelties of foreign invasion and the harshness of foreign rule.

All of these novels are written in very strong and effective language. Hazariprasad Dwivedi's words seem to automatically unfold their meaning. He keeps analysing language even as he tells a story. And Nagar's moulding of language to suit different characters is remarkable. In his writings there is a difference between the Avadhi dialect of the villager and the Avadhi of the city-folk, the Avadhi of the educated pandit and the Avadhi of the illiterate, the Avadhi of the Hindu and the Avadhi of the Muslim—this draws our attention spontaneously. To present-day readers of these novels history neither appears to be separate from themselves nor a very distant entity—and this is the greatest achievement of these texts. In them the material world and the spiritual realm are not antagonistic powers. Forest life and city life do not remain mutually unfamiliar.

Why Write a Historical Novel?

As a novelist I have been struggling with these questions for many years now. The first volume of *Todo Kara Todo* (Break, Break the Prison!), my novel on Swami Vivekananda, is titled 'Nirman' (Building) and was published in 1992; the second part 'Sadhana' was released in 1993, the third 'Parivrajak' (The Itinerant) in 2003, and the fourth 'Nirdesh' (Direction) in 2004. On hearing about my work on the first volume, a devotee of Swami Vivekananda, who happened to be one of my readers, asked me where I would get the material for my novel from. It would have to be from the biographies, isn't that so? When I cannot add anything to the biographies, or take anything away from them, what was my purpose in writing a novel? With so many good biographies of the swami already available, how could I write a novel on his life, and why should I write one? I too had such questions in my mind; they are there even today. And these are questions of genre. What is the difference between a biography and a historical novel? And when biographies are available, can a novel give anything extra?

In the last sixteen years I have found that a historical novel can indeed give much more than a biography. If it were not so, why would readers feel greater satisfaction on reading the novel even after they had studied the biographies and speeches of Swami Vivekananda? A novel is no more historical than a biography; it can never be so. Then, why is there the demand for the novel among readers?

No authentic biography of the swami states clearly why his family suddenly became so poor after his father's death. The biographies mention his sisters, but one does not know what happened to them after their father's death. The biographer

is writing the life of Swami Vivekananda, so why should he discuss the marriage of his sisters. The news of which sister's suicide reached Swamiji while he was at Almora? This and hundreds of such other questions remain unanswered in the biographies. The biographer tells us that Swamiji discussed Vedanta with Ajit Singh. He also had serious discussions with Harvilas Sharda and Shyamji Krishna Varma. But he does not tell us what these discussions actually were. He does not let us know who the Lallu Bhai who accompanied Swamiji to Chicago was, and to where he disappeared after Boston. In sum, though present in all places, the biographer is merely providing us with information; and that too selectively. The novelist enlivens the entire setting. He enters into the minds of all characters, much like God. He is present everywhere, and yet, is nowhere to be seen. He enters into other bodies. He does not merely watch his characters from a distance but identifies with them, becomes one with them.

It is thus that *Todo Kara Todo* becomes a historical novel. The distance between a historical past and our own time is virtually abolished. Its protagonist has no relation to politics. He is a being of Puranic proportions, though he is born and brought up in the densely populated city of Calcutta. He studies at Calcutta University. He is brought up like a prince and is made a pauper by his father's friends. Walking in torn soiled clothes, barefoot and hungry, he falls down unconscious. It is then that he has a divine experience. Spirituality so enters this real world that this handsome man, seeing whom American women went crazy, is not able to marry. The person, about whom Dr John Henry Wright was to write that his learning was greater than that of all the learned American professors put together, is not able to get a job worth a hundred rupees in Calcutta. He admits he was not born to marry, have children, and raise them by undertaking petty clerkship or teaching. He had come to the world with a mission. His master called it 'Mother's work'.

Travelling across the length and breadth of India, he had witnessed the sufferings of her children. Therefore, moving from one state to another, he preached the synthesis of modern knowledge with traditional wisdom. He was instrumental in the opening of a physics laboratory atop the palace of Raja Ajit Singh of Khetri. He inspired the Gaekwad of Baroda to provide technical education to the youth and open an engineering college. In America he asked for industrial skills in return for spiritual wisdom. A monk was formulating the educational policy of this country so that poverty and ignorance could be eliminated. The spiritual had come very near the temporal.

While immersed in samadhi at Kanyakumari, Swami Vivekananda saw two paths open for him. One was that of the vision of the Divine Mother, of the bliss of samadhi, and of personal liberation. The other was that of service to the poor and suffering children of Mother India. To him there was no longer any difference between the Divine Mother and Mother India. This monk had gone to America to wipe out the blot cast on the face of Mother India by foreigners, and also to earn money in aid of the helpless poor of his country, for he had come to know that the rich of India were selfish and self-centred and the poor inept.

This historical novel repeats the proclamation of the *Isha Upanishad* that no nation or society can remain happy by worshipping the world alone, neglecting the spirit. Neither can any country develop and earn happiness for itself by taking exclusively to spirituality, totally neglecting the world.

This historical novel has come a long way and has arrived at some conclusions which are not mere matters of principle for our society; instead they are matters of everyday living. It provides a complete philosophy of life that novels dealing exclusively with social and temporal subjects cannot. Of course, it does expect a little sattvic or refined intellect in its readers. Swami Vivekananda said that India need not get stuck in the quicksand of politics to attain freedom. Our problems will be solved of their own if we can get back our pristine sattvic character. PB



People's Poet: Subramania Bharati

Dr Prema Nandakumar

The renaissance in Tamil letters came to a full bloom with the advent of Subramania Bharati. Tamil language and literature are as old as Sanskrit, perhaps older, and there have been different 'ages' in its long history of more than two millennia. In the Sangam age (c. 300 BCE to 200 CE) great poetry was written. These poems have been anthologized in the *Pattu Pattu* (Ten Idylls), *Ettu Togai* (Eight Collections), and *Padinen Kizh Kanakku* (Eighteen Works). The epic age which followed (c. 200–600 CE) gave us the immortal *Manimekalai* and *Silappadikaram.* Thereafter, we received the wonderful hymnology of the bhakti age (c. 600–900 CE). The twelfth century gave us Kamban's classic Ramayana, *Ramakatai*. Even in the centuries looked upon as the dark ages (c. 1250–1750 CE), the Tamil genius continued to produce great poets like Arunagirinathar and Tayumanavar. The nineteenth century saw the stirrings of a new blossoming with the advent of Ramalinga Adigal, popularly known as Vallalar. By the end of the century the Western breeze had touched the Tamil intelligence in a creative manner. Tamil was freed from the pedantic punditry of the medieval ages and the stage was set to receive an outstanding genius. Subramania Bharati was born on 11 December 1882. The power of his presence has been so strong that nearly ninety years after his passing the Bharati age has not lost any of its sheen.

Subramania Bharati's short literary career was a many-faceted achievement. Hailing from a middle-class brahmana family of Ettayapuram in the erstwhile Tirunelveli district (presently Tutukudi), Bharati lost his mother early. His father Chinnaswami Iyer wanted him to pursue English education, but the boy's heart was already tuned to his mother tongue Tamil.

It was while working as a Tamil pundit at the Setupati High School, Madurai, that he met G Subramania Iyer, the legendary editor of *Swadeshamitran*, a Tamil daily. He was appointed as a sub-editor of this paper, which meant translating the speeches of great leaders like Swami Vivekananda, Sri Aurobindo, and Bal Gangadhar Tilak. Simplified and invigorated by his genius, Tamil prose glowed with a new strength. The patriot poet in him was also born at the same time. Those were the days of the Vande Mataram movement, and Bharati's fiery political articles soon roused the Tamil people. He became the full-fledged editor of the nationalist Tamil paper *India.* With the help of friends, he floated other papers too. In 1907 Swami Vivekananda's *Prabuddha Bharata* inspired him to start the English magazine *Bala Bharata* as a mouthpiece of nationalist ideals in South India. Explaining the name of the magazine, Bharati wrote:

> Some years ago, when Vivekananda had produced a new thrill in the world of philosophic thought by his deathless message of the Vedantic religion, there was started in this city a monthly journal, named *Prabuddha Bharata or Awakened India.* Ay,

that was the time of the awakening of the revived consciousness of Indian nationality, which has, at the present day, already attained the stage of joyous *Balatwa*, fond of fresh experiments, 'ever daring, ever advancing'.

Philosophic generalisation, has at all periods in the past, been the evolutive basis of every form of general progress in this country; and it is but proper, therefore, that the *Prabuddha Bharata* should have been wholly engaged in laying down the central doctrines peculiar to our national genius, reserving the adaptation of these doctrines to the various themes of life, for future workers. Sympathetic readers will, we believe, perceive a vein of unity and continuity between the *Prabuddha Bharata* and ourselves.

While the above might give a general idea of the fundamental principles which will guide our conduct, we feel ourselves bound, at the same time, to indicate, although briefly, the various means and methods whereby we propose to apply those principles, to the immediate duty before us, viz., the guiding of young Bharatas towards a true understanding of the Idea of Nationality and a sound practice of the tenets of the National Dharma.

The influence of Swami Vivekananda is evident in what Bharati wrote in the November 1907 number of *Bala Bharata*:

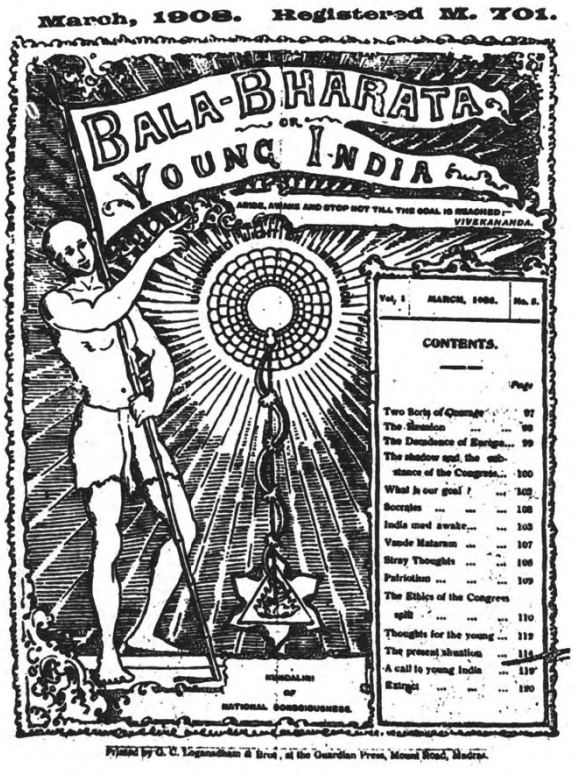
> Let us dream of a service so pure, so vast, so daring that in all our life, from the first moment to the last, there shall not be found a single thread of self!
>
> In every question that comes before you, make it your rule to assume that India has the essential. She has only to learn how to use it. She has unity, must organize and direct it. Has passionate love of country, must avail herself of it. Has abundance of democratic sense and method, must discover how to make use of it.

When Bharati went to the Calcutta session of the Congress in 1906, he made a point of meeting Swami Vivekananda's favourite disciple, Sister Nivedita. As soon as he met her, he realized that she certainly was an emanation from Mother Shakti. During their conversation the sister impressed upon him the need to overcome caste and credal prejudices. She stressed that women's emancipation was the imperative work that all educated Indians had to take up. He promised to act upon her exhortation and was as good as his word. Considering her as his guru, he dedicated the first two volumes of his patriotic poems, *Swadesha Gitangal*, to Sister Nivedita: 'I place this slim volume at the Teacher's feet who showed me the vision of Mother Bharat and instilled in me patriotism, even as Krishna revealed to Arjuna His *vishwarupa* and taught him the true nature of the Self.'

Bharati also wrote a gem-like poem on her:

> Nivedita, Mother,
> You, temple consecrated to love,
> You, Sun dispelling my Soul's darkness,
> You, rain to the parched land of our lives,
> You, helper of the helpless and lost,
> You, offering to grace,
> You, divine spark of Truth,
> My salutations to thee.

Subramania Bharati's fiery and caustic editorials, poems, and speeches soon drew the wrathful attention of the British government. The paper *India*


March, 1908. Registered M. 701.

BALA-BHARATA OR YOUNG INDIA

ARISE, AWAKE AND STOP NOT TILL THE GOAL IS REACHED.
VIVEKANANDA.

Vol. I MARCH, 1908. No. 8.

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NATIONALISM OF NATIONAL CONSCIOUSNESS.

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which he edited was an eyesore for the authorities, and an opportunity to arrest him was sought. On the advice of friends, Bharati preferred self-exile in Pondicherry and went there in 1909. Soon after, in 1910, Sri Aurobindo reached the seaside French enclave. Another reputed nationalist leader, V V S Aiyar also went into self-exile in Pondicherry. Bharati's decade-long stay in Pondicherry was the richest period in his literary career. He had great friends with whom he could study such sublime works as the Vedas. But he was also to suffer intense poverty during this decade. In 1918 he decided to return to British India. He was arrested at the Indo-French border and was lodged in Cuddalore Jail for twenty-five days. On being freed he spent some time in the village of Kadayam. Bharati was again invited to write for *Swadeshamitran*, and a new and happy chapter seemed to open up for the poet-journalist. Unfortunately, he passed away at the premature age of thirty eight on 12 September 1921.

The Bharati canon is sumptuous and comprises prose and poetry. Subramania Bharati's poems deal with various subjects: patriotism, devotion, ethics, and autobiography. His prose includes journalistic articles, short fiction, and an unfinished novel. Bharati's genius transformed all that he touched into good literature and often reached sublime heights.

The Patriot

The world outside Tamil Nadu has generally known Bharati only as a poet of freedom and patriotism. Many of his songs had an instant appeal when they were sung, and even today they do not fail to evoke national pride in the hearer. These poems were the offspring of the Vande Mataram movement. Bankimchandra Chatterjee's song was twice translated by Bharati, and each translation is both literal and poetic. He sang of his motherland as the Supreme Shakti, the Aryan queen; he even sang a *suprabhatam*, matins, to awaken her:

> But Mother, know you not your child?
> Can the mother sleep when the child awakes her?
> Is the mother's heart unmoved by the cries of the child?
> Mother! Great Bharat's queen!
> Know you not that in eighteen languages sweet
> We sing your praises in manifold ways?
> Come, come, and give us the blessings of your reign!
> Rise, O rise, Mother mine!

The physical contours of this rich land are brought to us with a sense of pardonable pride:

> The mighty Himavan is ours—
> There is no equal anywhere on earth;
> The generous Ganga is ours—
> Which other river can match her grace?

Bharati lists the great achievements of Indians in art, architecture, sculpture, philosophy, and literature and feels that unless India becomes free, such achievements will not be possible at all in the future. So political freedom must be given top priority in the Indian struggle for a new and better future:

> Although divorced from the joys of the hearth
> And consigned to dungeons dark;
> Although forced to exchange
> A time of cheer for days of gloom;
> Although ten million troubles rage
> To consume me entire;
> Freedom! Mother I shall not forget
> To worship you.

Bharati remembers the great heroes of the past: Arjuna, Shivaji, Guru Gobind Singh. There are living legends too, he reminds us: Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Lala Lajpat Rai, Sri Aurobindo, V O Chidambaram Pillai—the list grows long. And whatever be the subject, the turn in Bharati's poetry is always towards unity:

> What is life without unity?
> Division can only spell ruin.
> Could we but hold fast to this truth,
> What more shall we need?

Though Bharati died early, he was fortunate enough to see the approaching dawn in the advent of Mahatma Gandhi. His 'Mahatma Gandhi Panchakam' assures us that Gandhi's infusion of moral force into Indian politics would bring freedom to the land:

Dear as one's life to hold
The engineer of one's woes;
To know that all is God
And we are all his children;
Master! You've dared to harness
His prepotent moral force
To the murderous, strife-ridden
Political fray.

Subramania Bharati loved his mother tongue and Tamil Nadu deeply and found no contradiction in praising the Tamil land even as he praised Mother India. At a time when vote-seeking orations seek to cultivate narrow loyalties based on religion, caste, sect, region, and language, Subramania Bharati's message of an integral unity in meaningful diversity remains very relevant.

The Devotee

Bharati's devotional poems hail various divinities or consider knowledge itself as the divine force that moves the world. His didactic poem, 'Puthiya Athisudi' (New 'Athisudi'—a Tamil primer) gets off to a fine start with its truly secularist prayer:

Wearer of *athi* leaves and the young moon,
The ash-smeared in an eternal trance;
The dark-hued asleep on the ocean;
Revealer of wisdom to Muhammad;
Father of Jesus;
Even thus different sects describe
That eternal One; its nature is
Effulgent knowledge;
He who knows That is free from care;
May we praise that Grace
And gain immortal life.

Ganesha • Ganesha was a favourite deity of Bharati. While in Pondicherry, he was a regular visitor to the Manakkula Vinayaka temple not far from the beach. His *Vinayakar Nanmani Malai* lists out the good that accrues to devotees of Ganapati:

The inner ear will open to sounds; the inward eye
Will glow; It will blaze forth; manliness will be his gift;
One can issue forth in the directions
And plant the flag of victory; why, one can
Hold the venomous serpent in hand;
One can live for all time, never cowed down
By poison, illness, or dire enmity.

Shakti • While the encounter with Sister Nivedita seems to have imbibed him with a deep reverence for Shakti, the friendship with Sri Aurobindo during his ten-year stay at Pondicherry seems to have strengthened his devotion to the Mother Supreme. In fact, the group of songs on Shakti can be spoken of as the pivotal expressions of Bharati's devotion. His prayer is passionate:

Having tuned aright a stringed lute,
Shall we cast it on a rubbish heap to rot?
Listen, Mother Might! You've given me life
And lit this lamp of reason.
A burden, this to earth unless
My thoughts can be turned to deeds.
Vouchsafe me this power of action
To achieve my country's good.

The Kali form is dear to him at all times and he sees the Divine as the visible Creation:

You manifest as all, O Kali,
Everywhere you;
The bad and the good,
Aren't they the Divine's play?
The five elements, O Kali,
And the senses, all yourself:
O Kali, you are knowledge
Beyond the mind.

There is also the *terribilità* of Kali coming through in a cyclonic movement of diction and imagery in 'Uzhi-k-kuthu' (Dance of the Deluge), which describes Kali's dance of destruction:

As the worlds mightily clash
And crash in resounding thunder,
As blood-dripping demon-spirits
Sing in glee amid the general ruin,
To the beat and the tune, O Mother,
You leap in ecstatic dance!
Dread Mahakali! Chamundi! Gangali!
Mother, Mother, You've drawn me
To see you dance.

Krishna • If Bharati's devotion to Kali can be traced to his encounters with Sister Nivedita and Sri Aurobindo, his immersion in the Krishna experience was due to the poetry of the Alvars. Thus, Nammalvar's 'Kannan Kazhaladi' (The 'Ankleted' Feet of Krishna) inspired one in an identical rhythm:

O mind, remember
Kannan's holy feet;
It will give definitely
An indestructible form.
The Lord who sports
A darkling form,
Will give us riches,
Gratification and fame.

Bharati's *Kannan Pattu* (Krishna Songs) has twenty-three lyrics composed in lilting musical modes. The approaches to Krishna chosen by Bharati include that of considering the Lord as a servant. Krishna as a servant? The manner in which Bharati projects Krishna as a domestic servant is amazing. The poet has had troubles aplenty with servants, always asking for higher salaries and giving lame excuses for their absence. And then Krishna comes to him as a servant, introducing himself as of the cowherd clan. And as the days go by with this perfect servant, Krishna also becomes Bharati's friend, counsellor, teacher, and even God himself! The poems, 'Kannamma—my child' and 'Krishna—my mischievous boy' are justly famous. It is pure Periyalvar, cast in the mould of Bharati.

Bharati has handled bridal mysticism also, using perfect similes as the heroine-jivatman goes in search of the hero-Paramatman in six poems:

Like the worm in the fishing-rod,
Like a flame in the wind,
My heart did throb in anguish
For an endless term.
Like a caged parrot
I sorrowed alone.
Even the sweetest things
Turned bitter to my taste.

As with Andal's dream vision, Bharati insinuates one that infuses hope in the fading heart, and soon we come to the verse marking the change:

As I lived again in thought
The magic touch, the softness,
The body thrilled anew
And a novel peace was mine.
I wondered in my mind
Who He might have been:
Lo! The divine form of Krishna
Stood before my eyes.

Nature Mysticism and Advaita • The Sufi inspiration is clear in Bharati's songs to Kannamma, in which the poet-devotee is in search of divine beauty. He personifies beauty in Kannamma and seeks her in Nature without and imagination within by composing six songs titled 'Kannamma—my Lady Love':

Are those flame-bright eyes, Kannamma!
The sun and the moon?
Does the dark eye-ball, Kannamma!
Reflect the inky skies?
Are those woven diamonds gleaming
On the raven-like silken robe
The star-clusters above
In the middle of the night?

One of Bharati's finest poems 'Victory Drum' celebrates the establishment in Advaitic freedom:

Having vanquished the demon Fear,
And killed the reptile Lie,
We have embraced the Veda's path
That leads to Brahma-knowledge. ...
The crow and the sparrow are of us,
The sea and the mountain are of us;
'Tis ourselves everywhere we see,
And the heart dances with delight.

Bharati's devotion to the Ramakrishna movement may be gauged from his poem in praise of Swami Abedhananda:

As if great Shankara, flaming minister,
Whose fame reached up to the sky,
As if Shankara himself returned
To revisit this hoary land,
There came Vivekananda
The shining light—and when it ceased,
You came forward to make good the loss,
And continue his healing works among men.

Draupadi and Mother India • The epyllion *Panchali Sapatham* deals with the crucial Mahabharata episode of the disrobing of Draupadi and the grace of Krishna that guarded her from dishonour in the Kuru court. Bharati concentrates on the Pandava's loss of freedom, the outrage perpetrated by Duhshasana at the instigation of Duryodhana and Karna, the horrendous ordeal imposed upon Draupadi and the outpouring of grace followed by the awesome uncompromising vow of Panchali. The assaulted Draupadi in the Kuru court is very much an image of enslaved India. When she pronounces her vow, we are naturally reminded of the patriots of the Vande Mataram movement who were prepared to 'do or die'. Moreover, we see in Draupadi Indian womanhood oppressed by a male-dominated society since Puranic times. She also comes to us as an avatara of Mahashakti herself, and this is indicated by Bharati through the events that took place in the heavens when Draupadi was insulted and the gods grew pale. The divine feminine powers descended upon Draupadi:

> Youthful Uma, Kali herself the strong,
> The original Shakti with her trident in hand,
> The *mahamaya* that destroys illusion,
> Who exults among ghosts and corpses,
> Who destroys all by her smile while riding a lion,
> Who saves all by her smile while riding a lion.

In the Kuru court, Draupadi's lashing out at the heroic clan of Kauravas led by Bhishma is terrifying in its intensity:

> Finely, bravely spoken Sir!
> When treacherous Ravana, having carried away
> And lodged Sita in his garden,
> Called his ministers and law-givers
> And told them the deed he had done,
> These same wise old advisers declared:
> 'You have done the proper thing:
> 'Twill square with dharma's claims!'
> When the demon king rules the land
> Needs must the Shastras feed on filth!
> Was it well done to trick my guileless king
> To play at dice? Wasn't it deceit,
> A predetermined act of fraud
> Meant to deprive us of our land?
> O ye that have sisters and wives.
> Isn't this a crime on woman?
> Would you be damned for ever?

The Tamil Language

Two millennia of almost continuous literary history with an added significance of being a spoken tongue throughout this period have ensured a place of honour for Tamil (Tamizh) in the galaxy of languages of the world. It is considered by scholars as close to the proto-Dravidian, forerunner of the cultivated languages of South India. The richness of its vocabulary and the antiquity of its literature impart to Tamil a rank in the Dravidian group similar to that of Sanskrit among the Aryan languages. An ancient classical speech that possesses an enormous stock of indigenous literature, Tamil has retained its vigour and youthfulness with an abundant vocabulary to express modern ideas. It can be considered as a 'finer language to think and speak in than any European tongue'. In 'its poetic form,' says Dr Miron Winslow, 'Tamil is more polished and exact than Greek and in … borrowed treasures more copious than Latin'.

—*The Cultural Heritage of India*, 5.600

When we see Panchali taking her vow, it is the emanation of Mahashakti whom we see on earth. This multi-pronged signification of the Mahabharata heroine by Subramania Bharati has been well brought out by K R Srinivasa Iyengar:

> Just as Vidula's exhortation to her son Sanjay in the 'Udyoga Parva' comes to us today with the fervour of a stirring national anthem, so too the story of Draupadi's travail and ultimate triumph is seen invested with a high potential of significance that comprehends all instances of hard dealing, all records of wickedness, all manifestations of man's cruelty to man, all terror-haunted crucifixions, jehads, Belsens and Noakhalis. Draupadi, seen in this light, is the hunted amongst us, haunted by the spectre of Duhshasana approaching us with unclean aggressive hands, dazed by a feeling of the

> futility of the Bhishmas, Viduras, and Dronas that drone their somnolent words, strong only in our strength to die and in our unfaltering faith in God. More particularly, Draupadi the blessed eternal feminine is also Bharata Mata reduced to slavery and penury by her own dear ones, taunted and manacled and humiliated by the greedy foreigner no less than by the treacherous 'friend', starved in her body and maimed in her soul, isolated, trapped, mutilated—and yet somehow alive, alive with the strength of her Faith, alive in the knowledge of the puissance of God's timely succour. Draupadi whose soul is hurt by the spectacle of human cruelty, Bharata Mata whose body is bruised and whose soul is writhing in agony, and the Great Creatrix—the seed-of-all, womb-of-all—coalesce together and confuse our familiar categories of understanding. Draupadi is no doubt Woman—she is all the women who have borne the burden of suffering in this sullied sublunary sphere—but she is also, seen from another angle, the Shakti to whose awakened eyes the Parashakti has revealed Herself, and Her Personalities and Powers. Bharati's *Panchali Sapatham* viewed thus in the context of the Aurobindonian and Gandhian revolutions of our time is somewhat of a mantra of redemption, an enunciation of the religion of patriotism.

Kuyil Pattu is a narrative poem of 750 lines. It is a fable where we have a *kuyil*, koel, a monkey, and a bull. It is Bharati's dream-vision of the spirit of beauty and is pure romance. We cannot dismiss it as mere fancy, for the poet concludes with a challenge thrown at the reader:

> Howbeit a fictional tale, O wise old poets,
> Could my story yield on closer study
> A deep philosophical meaning,
> Won't you explain what it indeed is?

Versatile Optimist

If there is God's plenty in Bharati's poetic canon, his prose writings yield an equally rich treasure. The unfinished novel, *Chandrikaiyin Kathai* deals with widow-remarriage. *Aril Oru Pangu* (One-sixth) is about the tragedy of untouchability in India. *Jnana Ratham* is an account of the imaginary travels of the author in 'the chariot of knowledge'. He goes to the worlds of the Gandharvas, Satya, and Dharma. Dharmaraja reminds him of Bal Gangadhar Tilak! Soon the author's mind grows restless and he is back in this world of human affairs with a thud. The *Navatantra Stories* modelled after the *Panchatantra* are delightful.

A gifted translator, Bharati has rendered into Tamil a few of Rabindranath Tagore's stories, the 'Samadhi Pada' of Patanjali's *Yoga Sutra*, some hymns from the Vedas, and verses from the Gita. His mastery of English was remarkable; he loved the Romantics and called himself 'Shelley Dasan' (Shelley's servant). There is a crispness and directness about his English writing. Here is an extract from an essay where he analyses 'the place of woman':

> Nations are made of homes. And so long as you do not have justice and equality fully practised at home, you cannot expect to see them practised in your public life. Because it is the home life that is the basis of public life. And a man who is a villain at home cannot find himself suddenly transformed into a saint the moment he gets to the Councils or to Courts of Justice.

Always tuned to the future, Bharati did not have time for regrets. His philosophical poems underline this aspect very well. We must build for the future generations, not keep raking up the past, he commands:

> Stumble not, fools into the pit—
> The preying, destroying recapitulation
> Of things past and done with—
> Nor with the agony of vain regrets.
> The past will not return!
> Rather plant in your heart the thought
> That you have today achieved
> Another birth.

There have been innumerable books written about his priceless contribution to Tamil literature. The best tribute to Subramania Bharati comes from the legendary scholar-administrator Navaratna Rama Rao: 'So long as men love motherland and goodness, so long will Bharati continue to be read. Even if he lives only as long as the glorious Tamil language, it would not be incorrect to call him immortal.'

Culture and Spirituality in Krishnadeva Raya's Amuktamalyada

Dr R V S Sundaram

An Indian way of offering aesthetic tribute to a rare personality like Krishnadeva Raya involves saying that he is the star *dhruva* on the dark blue sky of literature. He is the only 'king-poet' remembered by one and all for his contributions to the epic genre of the Telugu literary world. He is also one of the outstanding poets who formulated a poetic diction for the Telugu epics. Besides being the most important king of the Vijayanagara empire, he became a legendary cultural figure—the only one to be rightly referred to as '*andhra bhoja*', the 'jewel of Andhra', for his literary taste and patronage.

There were eight great poets in Krishnadeva Raya's court, sitting in all the eight directions and carrying the burden of the literary world, just like the mythological *ashta-diggaja*s, the eight elephants that perform the same duty for the earth. It is this literary culture that makes the king-poet a symbol of Telugu language, culture, and literature.

Amuktamalyada

Each line of a true epic reflects some aspect of culture in one way or the other. A *mahakavya*, great poem, may be a literary achievement of a great poet, but an epic is a representative poetic creation of a cultural group. It represents the ideas, ideals, dreams, and aspirations of a society and its culture. *Amuktamalyada* is one such epic coming from the rich experience of a great king, poet, scholar, and philosopher.

Some literary historians have expressed doubts about the authorship of *Amuktamalyada*, based on the general opinion that a busy king like Krishnadeva Raya could never have been a poet of such high calibre. But Krishnadeva Raya is a rare personality of the highest order—he seems to have had the stamina to build a kingdom, to patronize poets and scholars, and to create literary works. His religious faith, philosophical thinking, rich vocabulary, inimitable style and grammar, and keen political thought are at a level different from his contemporary poets and scholars. He had an amazing ability to actualize political, social, religious, cultural, and literary concepts.

Krishnadeva Raya's linguistic and cultural policy is well articulated at the very beginning of the epic, where there is an account of Andhra Mahavishnu of Srikakulam appearing in a dream to the king during his campaign against Kalinga. Bhagavan Vishnu instructs the king to create an epic in Telugu and supports his command by explaining the linguistic responsibility of a king who is also a poet:

> Why Telugu? Because the country is Telugu.
> I am a Telugu deity, and Telugu is very sweet.
> You are aware of it as you converse with all rulers.
> Among all the languages of the country,
> Telugu is best.

Though a dream, the experience projects Krishnadeva Raya as the only person logically entitled to write an epic like *Amuktamalyada*. For it is Krishnadeva Raya who has authored such commendable and scholarly poems in Sanskrit as *Madalasa Charitra*, *Satyavadhu Prinana*, *Sakalakatha Sarasangraha*, *Jnanacintamani*, *and Rasamanjari*. Each one of these poems is known for its exquisite figures of speech, penetrating satire, suggestive imageries, gripping narrative, and proverbial sayings. Already established as a master of Sanskrit poetry, the king was now being asked to prove himself an outstanding poet in Telugu too by presenting a divine story.

Srivilliputtur

Krishnadeva Raya gives a colourful picture of

Srivilliputtur, a Vaishnava holy place in Tamil Nadu with sky-high buildings, beautiful carvings, cuckoos and parrots made of precious stones, well-planned streets with coconut trees on both sides, and elephant carvings in front of the houses. Krishnadeva Raya's astonishing descriptions are furnished with minute details that give an idea of his capacity for observation and his mastery of descriptive presentation. He speaks of *muggu*—floral designs—of paddy fields and different varieties of paddy, of *sugandhi* and other varieties of banana, of sugar cane, betel nut, and mango, depicting these poetically. He freely uses all his poetic skills of comparison and suggestion to describe the cultural background of Srivilliputtur.

Krishnadeva Raya is not just a poet; he is the representative of a land and its culture. He deserves wide appreciation for his ability to portray cultural traits in detail. It is not just the material culture with all its richness, but also the nuances of human nature, the subtleties of human behaviour in the given cultural context, the Indian way of reacting on different occasions, the hospitality and faith, and such other details that touch the hearts of readers.

Krishnadeva Raya's narration of the hospitality with which the devotees of Srivilliputtur were treating the *vishnubhakta*s, devotees of Vishnu, is amazing. Vishnuchitta was also a *vishnubhakta*, well-known for his culture and spirituality. He was not a scholar with formal education and training. He had no faith in the different scholastic disciplines like Tarka, Vyakarana, and Mimamsa and held the opinion that scholarship was meant only for discussions and debates. Spirituality, to him, was faith in the Supreme Being and in human beings as well. His philosophy was best manifested in the hospitality he offered through his *nyayarjita*, legal, earnings. His wife was the personification of hospitality and service, skilled in making arrangements in accordance with the seasons and auspicious times. Krishnadeva Raya tells us that 'even at midnight, if you happen to pass by the house of that disciplined man, you can hear the divine tales on Vishnu, the deity who sleeps on a snake, the chanting of *divya prabandha*s, the Tamil prayer texts, and such humble words in Sanskrit: *Nasti shakabahuta, nastyushnata, nastyapupom, nastyodana saushthavam-cha, kripaya bhoktavyam*—vegetables are few, they are not warm, there are no special items, and the rice is also not nice; (but) be kind enough to accept the meal'. We could hardly have a better description of the spirituality and hospitality of a traditional Indian household.

Madhurapuri

In the second canto of *Amuktamalyada* the city of Madhura is pictured. Certain elements in the description—graphic depiction and praise of the courtesan life, for instance—may not appear edifying or appeal to all tastes. But these provide us with glimpses into the cultural life during the days of monarchs. Besides, there also are details of those aspects of social life that would be seen as both commendable and relevant even today. The poet refers to the business community of Madhura earning money by legal means alone and donating generously to the deserved. Interestingly, businessmen of Madhura raise a flag atop their houses for every crore they earn—a unique way of declaring one's income!

In the midst of vivid descriptions of Madhura's glory, the poet narrates a thought-provoking incident. The scene is an elevated platform in front of the head-priest's house: A scholarly tourist visiting Madhura with the intention of having the darshan of the deity *Sundareshwara Tirunal* is served a delicious fruit drink while he is listening to the poetic renderings of the disciples. The Pandya king passes through the street on his way to the house of the royal courtesan. At that very moment the scholar tourist happens to be telling the boys that a man was expected to collect wood over eight months for use during the rainy season, and that one should be aware of the night, of old age, and of the other world after death, and also be prepared for these. The scholar's words act like mantras and the king realizes his mistake.

This is one of the important spiritual episodes in the epic. Krishnadeva Raya brings to bear all his poetic abilities on the narrative to assert the need for a philosophical discourse about the ultimate

Truth within every human being. The Pandyan king announces a prize for the scholar who can establish the best religious path to reach salvation. The prize is a bag full of gold coins which is left swinging in the midst of the court. To the poet this prize is nothing but a *kala sarpa*, a dark serpent or the serpent of time.

Religious Debates

Amuktamalyada is a religious essay that gives some intimate details about medieval society and culture in South India. Being a king, Krishnadeva Raya could provide us with much information about the procedure for admission to royal courts for religious discussion and the judgements that followed them. When Vishnuchitta goes to the court of the Madhura king, he is granted entry without any particular permit from the king as a regular religious debates was then in progress.

Vishnuchitta's arguments at the royal court and his win over the scholars belonging to different systems of philosophy is an important part of the epic. There is nothing special about establishing the doctrine of Vishishtadvaita, but the story of Khandikya and Keshidhwaja narrated by Vishnuchitta attracts the reader's attention. Khandikya is driven away by his brother Keshidhwaja. A time comes when Keshidhwaja is forced to take advice from Khandikya, who gets a chance to revenge himself. The option is clear: if Keshidhwaja is killed, Khandikya gets back his kingdom. But Khandikya knows well that gaining the lost kingdom by killing his stepbrother would give him worldly pleasures alone, and that too for a short period. Instead, maintaining a spiritual attitude always gives everlasting joy. Hence, Khandikya gives Keshidhwaja the advice he requested and sends him back. After sometime Keshidhwaja returns to reward his brother for his advice, and once again Khandikya's ministers suggest that he should get his kingdom back. Khandikya, however, requests Keshidhwaja for some lessons on raja yoga, a discipline in which he was an expert. This section of the text gives a detailed account of the way a spiritual life is to be conducted and the methods for attaining spiritual liberation; this provides an insight into the spiritual mind of Krishnadeva Raya.

Yamunacharya

The Yamunacharya episode is of importance in understanding Krishnadeva Raya's political and cultural philosophy. If Vishnuchitta is a religious thinker, Yamunacharya appears to be a political philosopher. He goes to the court of the Pandya king to establish Vaishnavism and is received with royal as well as religious honour. Though he seems to be seeking honour, Yamunacharya obtains enlightenment through the advice of a spiritual personality, Srirama Mishra. On the pretext of showing a traditional treasure, Mishra shows him the holy feet of Sri Ranganatha. Immediately, Yamunacharya realizes his mistake and is transformed into a saint. While transferring power to his son, the king elaborates upon the duties of the crown. This section, dealing with the political philosophy of Krishnadeva Raya, is one of the highlights of *Amuktamalyada*. It also seems to confirm that the work has a king, scholar, and political thinker as its author. While providing advice during the transfer of royal powers, Yamunacharya places spiritual life above all else. The main principle of Krishnadeva Raya's political philosophy, expressed through Yamunacharya's voice, is '*navishnuh prithivipatih*; one who is not Vishnu cannot become a king'. He preaches that a king should always stand for the fulfilment of the needs of common people and for their protection. No work should be entrusted to the wicked. If a king stands for the welfare of his people, the people in turn stand behind the king. The Almighty, who exists within the people, will fulfil the king's desires. This section, with more than eighty verses recording Krishnadeva Raya's political philosophy, is one of the major contributions to Indian history and culture.

Godadevi: Amuktamalyada

The name 'Amuktamalyada' refers to the tender feelings of a sincere devotee: Andal, in Tamil, or Godadevi, in Sanskrit. 'Amuktamalyada' is the Sanskrit translation of the Tamil title 'Sudi Kudutta



VANI PRADEEP

Andal (Thanjavur painting)

Nacciyar, meaning 'the maid who made the offering after having used it herself'. In her innocence, Goda was unaware that a thing already used cannot be offered to the deity. She would decorate herself with a garland and then offer it to Sri Ranganatha, thinking that a 'tested' garland would suit him better. Goda was Vishnuchitta's foster daughter, and her offering to Sri Ranganatha was a true symbol of *madhura bhakti*, devotion in the conjugal mode. Sri Ranganatha was very pleased with Goda's innocence and was happy to accept her offering of love.

The Godadevi episode is only one among the many in the text, but the epic was titled after the little heroine as she is the symbol of pure love. It also refers to the love with which the poet Krishnadeva Raya offered his garland of poetry to his beloved deity, Ranganatha.

Maladasari

The Maladasari Katha is one of the popular stories in Telugu literature. The nature of genuine spirituality, beyond the conventions of caste and creed, is the theme of the episode. Maladasari was a dalit devotee who lived near Kurungudi. Every day, without fail, he would sing in praise of Vishnu. His costume, with its rich ornamentation, was typical of a staunch devotee. He had ear ornaments with *shankha* and *chakra*. He carried a lamp and a musical instrument called *kinnera*. He was such a great and faithful devotee that he could dissolve even hard stones through his soulful singing. He would dance even in extremely hot weather, unconcerned about thirst and hunger.

One day Maladasari, not conscious of the time, started walking towards the temple at midnight. He lost his way and entered a forest. There he came across a huge banyan tree, where a *brahma-rakshasa*, a demon, was living. When the demon was about to kill him, Maladasari earnestly requested for some time to offer prayers to the Lord before being killed, promising the demon to return after his prayers were over. The devotee kept his promise, returned to the demon, and requested him to have him for food. The demon was so pleased with Maladasari's sincerity that he refused to kill him. Maladasari became very upset for not being able to keep his promise. The demon then requested him to share with him the *punya*, merit, of having offered prayers to Lord Vishnu, so that he could be released from his demon body. Maladasari agreed to part with his *punya* and helped the demon to get rid of his curse and become a human being. The incident reminds one of the famous story of the cow and the tiger: Govyaghra Samvada.

Amuktamalyada is unique among epics in integrating cultural and spiritual ingredients in a devotional matrix. Generally, culture is attributed to the achievements of human beings in secular fields, especially in the fine arts. *Amuktamalyada* supports the doctrine that culture is better reflected in the behaviour and character of the members of a community than in their material achievements, spirituality being its ultimate goal. No episode in this epic is an exception to this rule.

(*Continued on page 440*)

Spirituality in American Literature

Janice Thorup

Spirituality in the literature of the United States of America begins with themes set forth in our founding documents—the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States. These documents articulate values that its people continue to define and struggle to achieve. They are taken up in the best of our literature, which begins with the documents themselves.

On 4 July 1776 the rebellious Declaration of Independence was signed, proclaiming the United States to be free from the authority of the British government. This document outlined certain 'self-evident' truths and 'unalienable rights': 'We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.'

Eleven years later, the preamble to the Constitution of the United States built on these ideas: 'We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.'

The themes outlined in these two documents—that equality, life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness are basic rights, and that justice and tranquillity and the 'blessings of liberty' should be the aims of a perfect government—could be said to form the basis of American literature and the spirituality contained therein. The objectives of liberty and equality, Swami Vivekananda asserted, are 'the noblest aspirations of mankind that unfolds human personality towards all-round development—both material and spiritual.'[1]

We have not always lived up to the principles proposed in these documents. Our history has been written through our struggles to achieve the ideals of justice and equality. Equal rights have been withheld from women, slaves, immigrants, and the native peoples of this land. As today's battles in America over gay marriage attest, our understanding of these rights and those who are free to hold them is still being forged.

Justice and Freedom

As the twentieth century historian and philosopher Isaiah Berlin pointed out, justice is a value at odds with other values. There is a fundamental problem, a necessary conflict, inherent in the values which the laws of the United States are based on. Berlin writes, 'The extent of a man's, or a people's, liberty to choose to live as they desire must be weighed against the claims of many other values, of which equality, or justice, or happiness, or security, or public order are perhaps the most obvious examples.'[2]

Freedom, then, is in conflict with other deeply held values of the democratic experiment: it must be reconciled with equality, justice, happiness, security, and public order. The resulting dichotomies and contradictions have played out in US history in the struggles of blacks, women, native peoples, and immigrants. How is individual liberty maintained against the need for social justice?

The problem of justice is one we have struggled with as a nation from our inception. When a form of government is capricious—granting justice and equality unfairly—individuals have two recourses: the first is submission; the second, revolution. In choosing submission, it is tempting to take justice out of the hands of men and put it into the hands of God. In our pre-Revolutionary, Puritan past (1620–1783),

a single sermon provides an example of this.

Justice in God's Hands

In 1741 Jonathan Edwards, the famous theologian and philosopher of British American Puritanism, delivered 'Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God', a frighteningly descriptive portrayal of hell. Edwards warned his congregants that they faced a 'lake of burning brimstone ... the dreadful pit of the glowing flames of the wrath of God'. He warns all who have not been 'reborn in Christ' that they are dangling over the open mouth of hell, the 'flames of wrath' reaching up toward them. Only God's hand stays the fall. 'You hang by a slender thread,' Edwards preached. Justice, for Edwards, is in the hands of God and will be meted out not in this life, but the next. All that is necessary here and now is to be on the right side of God's mercy.

This sentiment was shared by many slaves who were converted to Christianity in the days before Emancipation. An old slave song lists the injustices heaped upon slaves:

> We raise de wheat, Dey gib us de corn;
> We bake de bread, Dey gib us de cruss;
> We sif de meal, Dey gib us de huss;
> We peal de meat, Dey gib us de skin;
> And dat's de way Dey take us in;
> We skim de pot, Dey gib us de liguor,
> And say dat's good enough for nigger.[3]

Such wrongs were made tolerable for some by the surety of things being made 'right' in heaven. The central character in Harriet Beecher Stowe's anti-slavery novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, published in 1852, explored the lives of slaves in situations both bad and good—if 'good' can ever be applied to slavery, Stowe believed it could not. Uncle Tom is a slave sustained by the belief in a justice unattainable in this life, but sure to come in the next. Tom delivers this speech to the third man who 'owns' him, the cruel 'Master' Legree:

> Mas'r Legree, as ye bought me, I'll be a true and faithful servant to ye. I'll give ye all the work of my hands, all my time, all my strength; but my soul I won't give up to mortal man. I will hold on to the Lord, and put his commands before all,—die or live; you may be sure on't. Mas'r Legree, I an't a grain afeard to die. I'd as soon die as not. Ye may whip me, starve me, burn me,—it'll only send me sooner where I want to go.[4]

Justice in the Age of Enlightenment

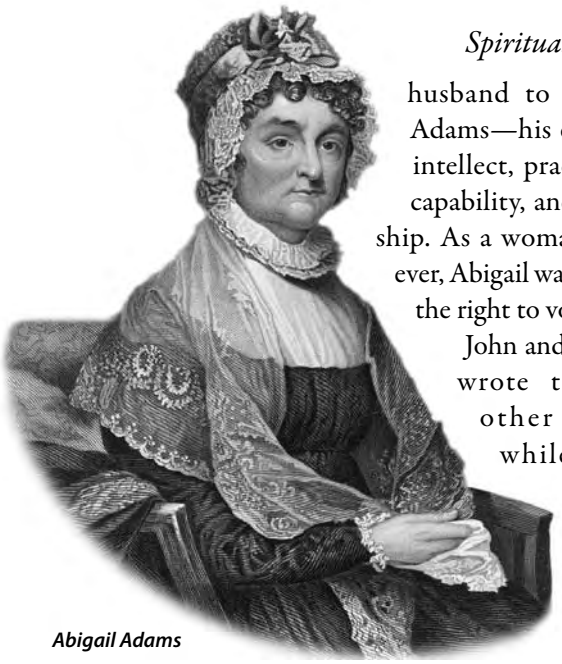
This understanding of justice, as something attainable only in heaven and only through the mercy of God, is challenged during the Age of Enlightenment—second half of the eighteenth century. Men of the Enlightenment believed in a universal understanding of right and wrong, upon which action against injustice was not just a right but a necessity, born of duty. Indeed, the bulk of the Declaration of Independence is a justification for the act of revolution, written for 'the opinions of mankind' and calling on the 'Laws of Nature and of Nature's God', which gave them authority to stand against injustice and dissolve the 'political bands' with England.

The Declaration of Independence includes the observation that human beings are 'more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed'. The founding fathers of the United States rejected this tired submission. Justice and equality were truths to be realized through the hands of men, not God. The country they founded was based on the principle that a nation's people can be governed to ensure these ideals.

But this Declaration and the later Constitution were written by an exclusive class of men. The rights they expounded were extended, initially, only to people like themselves: white, Christian, landowning, male. The history of the United States, and its spiritual striving, has been one of expanding the circle of those to whom these rights are self-evident truths.

Suffragettes

John Adams, second president of the United States and signer of the Declaration of Independence, was



Abigail Adams

husband to Abigail Adams—his equal in intellect, practicality, capability, and leadership. As a woman, however, Abigail was denied the right to vote.

John and Abigail wrote to each other daily while they were separated. John's political obligations often required his presence in Philadelphia and abroad. Abigail stayed behind in Massachusetts, managing their farm, raising their children, offering support and advice to John through her letters.

Abigail's letters show no sense of subordination. Confident in her ability to advise her husband, she wrote in a letter dated 31 March 1776: 'I have sometimes been ready to think that the passion for Liberty cannot be Eaqually [*sic*] Strong in the Breasts of those who have been accustomed to deprive their fellow Creatures of theirs. Of this I am certain that it is not founded upon that generous and christian principal [*sic*] of doing to others as we would that others should do unto us.'[5]

Abigail places the 'passion' for Liberty squarely within the Christian tradition and asks that we test our passion against the principle of doing unto others as we would have them do unto us. She continues:

> I long to hear that you have declared an independancy [*sic*]—and by the way in the new Code of Laws which I suppose it will be necessary for you to make I desire you would Remember the Ladies, and be more generous and favourable to them than your ancestors. Do not put such unlimited power into the hands of the Husbands. Remember all Men would be tyrants if they could. If particular care and attention is not paid to the Ladies we are determined to foment a Rebelion [*sic*], and will not hold ourselves bound by any Laws in which we have no voice, or Representation (121–2).

Abigail seeks legislation to prevent men from becoming 'tyrants'. Inherent in man, in Abigail's view, is a beast that needs containment. She sees the opportunity in a new Code of Laws to prevent the injustices of the past and create a new country in which no one is the victim of tyranny.

In his return letter, John writes of the injustice inherent in the class structure of the colonies: 'The Gentry are very rich, and the common People very poor. This Inequality of Property, gives an Aristocratical Turn to all their Proceedings, and occasions a strong Aversion in their Patricians, to Common Sense. But the Spirit of those Barons, is coming down, and it must submit' (122).

His attention is on 'Inequality of Property', which he sees clearly and writes about with passion. But he answers Abigail's request for gender equality with these words:

> As to your extraordinary Code of Laws, I cannot but laugh. We have been told that our Struggle has loosened the bands of Government every where. That Children and Apprentices were disobedient—that schools and Colledges were grown turbulent—that Indians slighted their Guardians and Negroes grew insolent to their Masters. But your Letter was the first Intimation that another Tribe more numerous and powerfull than all the rest were grown discontented (122–3).

That John Adams had not even *thought* of the matter of gender equality is telling, given the independence and political acuity of his wife. But he had not. And even when he turned his attention to her plea, he could not 'but laugh'. He is unwilling to fight for the extension of equality to 'Children and Apprentices ... Indians and Negroes' much less to women.

Abigail's threatened 'Rebelion' did not ensue for a hundred years. In 1876, a century after Abigail Adams raised the issue of gender equality, Susan B

Anthony wrote: 'Resolved, that the women of this nation in 1876, have greater cause for discontent, rebellion and revolution than the men of 1776.'[6]

Women were *still* fighting for the fundamental right to vote in 1893 at the World's Parliament of Religions—the same Parliament at which Vivekananda delivered his stirring 'Sisters and Brothers of America' speech. Suffragette Elizabeth Cady Stanton's address from the Women's Congress to the Parliament included these lines: 'The new religion will teach the dignity of human nature and its infinite possibilities for development. It will teach the solidarity of the race that all must rise or fall as one. Its creed will be Justice, Liberty, Equality for all the children of earth.'[7]

Stanton's vision of a 'new religion' that encompasses 'all the children of the earth' and her recognition that 'all must rise or fall as one' presents a *spiritual* understanding of equality. It would not be until 1920 that the nineteenth amendment to the US constitution gave women the right to vote. But the notion of equality as a spiritual value found resonance in America's transcendentalist movement.

Equality in Transcendentalism

Can a government, a political system, a people, dictate equality for all? Or is equality a spiritual principle, realized and acted upon individually? In the writing and poetry of the American transcendentalists, the idea of unity supersedes the political understanding of equality.

Walt Whitman's 'Song of Myself,' published in 1855, includes these stanzas:

> I celebrate myself, and sing myself,
> And what I assume, you shall assume,
> For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you.[8] ...
> And I know that the spirit of God is the brother of my own,
> And that all the men ever born are also my brothers, and the women my sisters and lovers,
> And that a kelson[9] of the creation is love (28).

Equality, here, is being seen spiritually, as Oneness: 'Every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you.' We are all related, all made of the same stuff. In our very composition, we are all equal. Further, we are related as human beings and share the spirit of God.

Transcendentalism was a movement within romanticism (1820s to 1861), characterized by a preference for imagination over reason and an insistence on individual observation as a path to knowledge. Transcendentalists looked to intuition for moral guidance and sought the Divine in life around them, particularly in nature. Their belief in a transcendent reality will be familiar to Vedantins.

Ralph Waldo Emerson, himself a transcendentalist, describes the movement in a lecture called 'The Transcendentalist', delivered in 1842: 'Transcendentalism ... is Idealism. As thinkers, mankind have ever divided into two sects, Materialists and Idealists; the first class founding on experience, the second on consciousness; the first class beginning to think from the data of the senses, the second class perceive that the senses are not final.'[10]

The transcendentalist, says Emerson, sounding very much like Patanjali, 'does not deny the presence of this table, this chair, and the walls of this room, but he looks at these things as the reverse side of the tapestry, as the *other end*, each being a sequel or completion of a spiritual fact which nearly concerns him' (194).

When an Idealist intends his attention on the Divine, the world falls away. Problems of inequality cease to exist in the perception of Oneness. In his essay 'Nature', Emerson speaks of non-duality: 'I become a transparent eye-ball; I am nothing; I see all; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or particle of God' (10). In God, there is unity and therefore all are equal. Only in the worldly, material sense of things is there a diversity that leads to inequality.

It has been argued that we humans are, by our very nature, selfish. We are hard-wired from our evolutionary past to seek our own preservation above that of others. Our only escape from this selfishness is to broaden our view of 'self'. Emerson looks out from a 'transparent eye-ball', losing his

sense of himself as an individual and thereby seeing *all* as himself. He has reached the understanding that he is 'part or particle' of God.

In 1841, in another essay 'The Oversoul', Emerson wrote: 'Within man is the soul of the whole; the wise silence; the universal beauty, to which every part and particle is equally related; the eternal ONE. And this deep power in which we exist, and whose beatitude is all accessible to us, is not only self-sufficing and perfect in every hour, but the act of seeing and the thing seen, the seer and the spectacle, the subject and the object, are one' (386).

It is in the 'eternal ONE' that we ultimately find equality. A spiritual understanding of unity allows us to act out the belief that we are all created equal. But the question remains: how do we govern in this world to make the effect of that understanding apparent? What do *lived* equality and justice look like? What is required of humanity to live out the implications of this understanding? Can equality extend to all humans, regardless of their birth and situation in life? These questions were central in the great conflict brewing in the United States of America in the mid-nineteenth century.

That All Men Are Created Equal

In 1860 four million slaves laboured in the southern United States; the agricultural economy there was completely dependent on slave labour. The northern states, increasingly industrial, relied on an immigrant pool of labour—poorly paid but nonetheless free. In the South, slavery was considered necessary; in the North the practice was seen as inherently unjust. A civil war ensued in 1861 to decide the matter.

The conflict was two-fold. In addition to the matter of slavery, states' rights, provided for by the Constitution, were at stake. The owning of slaves was a protected right in southern states, and initially, the Civil War was fought to keep the practice from spreading to new territories opening up in the west. Eventually, President Lincoln came to believe that slavery was a higher evil than the evil of a central government imposing its will on individual states.

In the middle of the Civil War, Lincoln gave a speech to consecrate a graveyard on the battlefield at Gettysburg. In his famous Gettysburg Address (1863), Lincoln echoed the Declaration of Independence and the principles on which it was founded: 'Fourscore and seven years ago, our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal. Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure.'

The proposition 'that all men are created equal' hinged on the definition of the word 'men'. Were slaves 'men'? Or was there a caste-like difference that denied them the rights assigned to the framers of the Constitution—that class of white, Christian, landowning men?

Both sides in the Civil War claimed justice and God for their side. Julia Ward Howe's 'Battle Hymn of the Republic' (1861) inspired the North with these words:

> In the beauty of the lilies Christ was born across the sea,
> With a glory in his bosom that transfigures you and me;
> As he died to make men holy, let us die to make men free,
> While God is marching on.

while the Southern states sang:

> God made the right stronger than might,
> Millions would trample us down in their pride.
> Lay Thou their legions low, roll back the ruthless foe,
> Let the proud spoiler know God's on our side.
> Let the proud spoiler know God's on our side.[11]

In the end, the Civil War preserved the union of the United States and ended the practice of slavery, but it failed to ensure equal rights for those who had been enslaved.

On-going Struggles

Issued on 1 January 1863, the Emancipation

Proclamation, declared that 'all persons held as slaves are, and henceforward shall be free'.

But equality did not follow. During the Harlem Renaissance, a flowering of black culture in the 1920s and 1930s, Langston Hughes wrote the poem 'Let America be America Again', published in 1938, reflecting his experience of the white-dominated culture in the US:

> Let America be America again.
> Let it be the dream it used to be.
> Let it be the pioneer on the plain
> Seeking a home where he himself is free.
> (America never was America to me.)

His poem goes on to evoke those grand ideals of the Declaration of Independence, calling for America to become a 'strong land of love'. And again he repeats '(It never was America to me.)'.

Hughes longs for an America in which 'opportunity is real, and life is free, / equality is in the air we breathe' but laments:

> (There's never been equality for me.
> Nor freedom in this 'homeland of the free'.)

In a history-sweeping stanza, Hughes expresses solidarity with all who have fallen on the wrong side of 'equality':

> I am the poor white, fooled and pushed apart,
> I am the Negro bearing slavery's scars.
> I am the red man driven from the land,
> I am the immigrant clutching the hope I seek—
> And finding only the same old stupid plan
> Of dog eat dog, of mighty crush the weak.

His poem ends, however, on a note of hope fulness:

> Out of the rack and ruin of our gangster death,
> The rape and rot of graft, and stealth, and lies,
> We, the people, must redeem
> The land, the mines, the plants, the rivers.
> The mountains and the endless plain—
> All, all the stretch of these great green states—
> And make America again!

The United States has struggled in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries through two world wars, through a great depression that further divided the rich and the poor, through globalization, and now a world-wide economic crisis, all of which has enlarged the stage on which we view the struggle to ensure justice and freedom and equality.

The note of hopefulness that ended Langston Hughes' poem is echoed in the inaugural poem written for the swearing in of President Barack Obama, first African-American president of the United States, in January of 2009. The poem 'Praise Song for the Day', written by Elizabeth Alexander, begins slowly with scenes from ordinary American life: people sewing, making music, waiting for a bus, sitting in a classroom. All across the US, people live their individual, quotidian lives. She remembers our history, our progress:

> We cross dirt roads and highways that mark the
> will of some one and then others,
> who said I need to see what's on the other side.

And then, calling attention to this event—the naming of an African-American man to our highest office—she writes:

> Say it plain: that many have died for this day.
> Sing the names of the dead who brought us here,
> who laid the train tracks, raised the bridges,
>
> picked the cotton and the lettuce, built
> brick by brick the glittering edifices
> they would then keep clean and work inside of.
>
> Praise song for struggle, praise song for the day.

The United States of America has come to be what it is today through the toil of many who did not enjoy equal rights—the slaves and immigrants and poor who lived in a land of plenty but were denied their share of it. Alexander's list echoes Hughes' catalogue of poor whites, the negro and red man, the immigrant and the weak, factory workers, miners, children.

Like Hughes' poem, however, Alexander's ends on a note of hopefulness, seeking a spiritual understanding of the values on which the United States was founded:

Some live by love thy neighbor as thyself,
others by first do no harm or take no more
than you need. What if the mightiest word is love?

Love beyond marital, filial, national,
love that casts a widening pool of light,
love with no need to pre-empt grievance.

'What if the mightiest word is love?' Alexander asks, echoing Whitman's phrase: 'a kelson of the creation is love'. Whitman saw our equality in terms of atoms—our very elemental construction being the same as all of creation; Emerson saw our equality in the sharing of a universal soul. The framers of our founding documents saw equality as a lived reality in a country born brave and free, though they saw blindly, dismissing great swathes of humanity.

Alexander ends her poem:

In today's sharp sparkle, this winter air,
any thing can be made, any sentence begun.
On the brink, on the brim, on the cusp,

praise song for walking forward in that light.

To return to our earlier question—Can a government, a political system, a people, dictate equality for all?—we must honestly answer, *no* or at least *not yet* or, more precisely, *not on this earth in any sort of political system we have seen*. And yet, as the transcendentalists knew, as Elizabeth Cady Stanton spoke, we can, one by one, experience equality in the union we seek with the Divine, the union by which we see that we are all One.

We can seek equality in our understanding that love must be at the centre of our struggles. In that 'widening pool of light' cast by love, in which we are more than brothers and sisters, more than countrymen or even citizens of the world, we can experience an equality that comes not vertically, through laws or declarations or constitutions, but horizontally, through spiritual understanding expressed in our relationships with others.

In the material world, we do the best we can. We strive for freedom and justice and equality available to all. We face our blind spots one by one, enlarging the circle of those we include in our definition of 'self'.



Elizabeth Cady Stanton

Our struggles are not behind us. In fact, they seem bigger than ever. But the spirit of America—the striving for liberty, for equality, for justice—will continue to inform our lives and our literature. When we are aimed towards the best in ourselves, towards a spiritual understanding of what truly makes us equal, we move closer to that 'perfect union' we named as our goal.

Acknowledgement

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(*Continued on page 444*)

Ecstasy in Daily Life

Swami Ranganathananda

(*Continued from the previous issue*)

The modern world can really be redeemed if there is a little love in the heart of man. But it is very difficult to find that. How much we pray today for that integrating principle which can bring harmony in society. How many times have men like Bertrand Russel, men like Hocking of the Harvard University, have said that this world is in a mess and the only way to clear the mess is to bring a little love into the heart of man. A little altruism, a little love; that is what they said. How to manufacture that love? That is a great theme with many of these writers today. And when you experience something you talk less about it. When you talk too much of a thing, that means you have little experience of it. Talk and experience are inverse in ratio. Today's man talks so much of love, only because he does not know what it is. He has no experience of it. When you have experience you will not talk about it at all.

Love in Society

So what did the great thinkers say? This world can be transformed if only a little love comes into the heart of man. The greatness of this bhakti religion is that it gives you the science and technique of cultivating love in everyday life. You need not be an ascetic going to a cave or a forest for cultivating love of God. In whatever context you are, you can cultivate that love if you know the philosophy and technique behind it. When people become full of love, it means that husband, wife, children have all learned how to cultivate love in the heart. What a happy life it will be, how fulfilled it will be! We are not material specimens; we are human beings—warm human beings in the midst of other warm human beings. See also into society—your neighbours, the citizens around you; is there love in their heart? That is what we miss very much. Ninety-nine per cent of the mental agonies and psychic distortions of man today arise from this feeling of not getting love around or within: 'I can't love, I can't get love.' I become reduced to nothingness. When you get this bhakti, you will strengthen society; that social context in which you conduct your life will be full of positive force. Love is the only positive force.

It must be very difficult to love. No; *susukhaṁ kartum*, it is easy to do. You need not do any big gymnastics for it. No big technique is necessary. Though people offer so many techniques—difficult things to do—bhakti has nothing to do with all that. All those mechanical things that you do—even some of the teachings given, like doing twenty hours of *pranayama*—bhakti does not advocate. Bhakti is something else. It is *susukhaṁ kartum*. And yet the fruit is infinite, *avyaya*. The expenditure is little but the product is infinite in value. That is how bhakti is presented in the Gita, in the Bhagavata, and today in the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna. 'Bhakti as taught by Narada is the religion for this age,' Sri Ramakrishna said. People can learn to love each other. That is bhakti—the Christian bhakti, the Islamic bhakti, and the Hindu bhakti. Bhakti is one; it may be expressed through any tradition.

Brother Lawrence and Thomas A Kempis, author of the *Imitation of Christ*, experienced this love and ecstasy. They say: Even if I lift a simple blade of grass from the earth—a flimsy job it is, very ordinary—if I do it in the love of Jesus, I shall be very blessed. If the love of Jesus is there in that act, then it becomes

This is the transcript of a parlour talk given by the author during one of his international tours. The text has been minimally edited.

blessed. If love is not there, then even the top job becomes absolutely dry, absolutely lifeless, meaningless. Work has become drudgery. Why? Love is not there. No work can become drudgery if love is behind it, and in this case love of the Divine. Every work becomes elevated when a bit of love is put into it. No creaking, no tension, no contrary force will work in life if that love is there. To the door creaking all the time you put a little oil and immediately the creaking goes away.

Bhakti wants to bless man with this great blessing by inciting in him this wonderful love so that all his life becomes a life of joy. There will be struggles, there will be problems, there will be difficulties; but he will keep a smile facing. This can be demonstrated, says the above verse: *pratyakṣāvagamam*. It is not a theory. Many have lived it, we can also live it. A housewife working from morning till evening and yet smiling, full of joy. That is called ecstasy in daily life.

Spiritual Ecstasy

Christianity has both the sides; Hinduism has both the sides: dogmatic and spiritual. The spiritual says: 'God is your own infinite Self'; 'The kingdom of Heaven is within you'. To be aware of it is your struggle. That struggle makes for a joy which no other struggle can give. That is why it is possible that every human being can develop that sense of ecstasy in daily life. We have only to attend to it, cultivate it. The word is 'cultivation' or 'culture'. Then, life becomes different.

What is the nature of that ecstasy? We associate ecstasy with great mystics, great ascetics. What about us—we poor people living in the house, working in the garden, working in the factory; can we also get that ecstasy? The teachers of bhakti say yes, it is everybody's property. Why only delegate it to special mystics? You can bring it to your own experience.

'Ecstasy' is a wonderful word. Whenever you are ecstatic you don't feel the earth's pull of gravitation. You don't touch the earth. You just move, as if there is no gravitation. In daily life you get it in one instance: if you take a bit of wine; a little more wine and you lose that gravitation. That ecstasy is of course available. I have seen many people getting that ecstasy.

I went to Edinburgh University to give a lecture. After that I went to Glasgow University—fifty miles to the West—for another lecture. I did not know the way to the university. My friend was there with me and we had a car. We entered Glasgow town. We wanted to know the way to the university. Somebody was walking on the footpath. We asked, 'Will you please show us the way to the university?' 'Oh, yeah,' he said. I thought, 'Fine, we get good help.' I got him to sit in our car. This way, that way—we went on for half an hour; we went nowhere. Only then did we find that he was in high ecstasy! I said, 'Namaskar; will you please get down? With my ignorance I can find my way better than with that ecstasy.' Then I found throughout the city people lying on the street, on the footpath, in high states. They told me: 'Glasgow is a highly ecstatic city. It is a port city. The whole of England and the whole of Scotland have plenty of drinks, but Glasgow tops all.' So that is one ecstasy. It is ecstasy, but a very poor ecstasy, making you less day by day.

This question of ecstasy came up in ancient Greece. It was not there in Olympian religions, but in the mystery religions centred at Eleusis near Athens this subject of ecstasy came up: How to make man ecstatic? They instituted a scheme of initiation. You must be initiated into that mystery religion and then you will have ecstasy. Thousands of people used to come from all over Greece to Eleusis. I have visited Eleusis. Now there are only some broken buildings there. At one time it was a centre of a great mystery cult. There people were taken in, initiated, and they got ecstasy. But along with that initiation something was given to the initiate. That was wine. Naturally, there was ecstasy with that initiation. In the Greek language, as in modern English, the word used was 'en-thu-siasm'. 'Enthous' actually means 'God inside you'. So, during initiation God is planted inside you. Naturally, you become full of joy. That is called 'enthusiasm'. Now God is not always available, but at least wine can go in! So that became an instrument of enthusiasm. That is how wine came into the picture. Enthusiasm

you must get. If God doesn't give you, God's representative can give you enthusiasm! The same thing happens today with marijuana and LSD.

But in the bhakti religion and the science of bhakti, none of these extraneous enthusiasms are there. Bliss comes from within yourself. Pure, welling up spontaneously. That is the meaning of ecstasy in daily life in the bhakti religion. I have seen people full of love of God, always full of joy. Difficulties come, troubles come; yes, they can face them with a sense of joy because God has entered their heart. That is the test of true bhakti: joy.

Life has struggle, tension, suffering. I take to religion not to increase the tension and suffering but to reduce it, to bring joy. That is the positive approach given to religion in Vedanta, in the bhakti tradition. Sri Ramakrishna was the latest example in our times—always joyous. He taught that people must experience joy through religion, not sorrow, not sadness. Vivekananda went so far as to say, 'What business have you with clouded faces? It is terrible. If you have a clouded face, do not go out that day, shut yourself up in your room. What right have you to carry this disease out into the world?'[5] Sadness and sorrow is not religion, it is a pathological condition: 'The first sign that you are becoming religious is that you are becoming cheerful. When a man is gloomy, that may be dyspepsia, but it is not religion' (1.264). Whenever there is dyspepsia you feel sorrow; there is no religion in it. When you touch God, you get only joy.

God is described as *ānandamaya*, and Sri Ramakrishna used to sing: 'O, Divine Mother! You are of infinite bliss. Don't make me bereft of bliss.' That is how he used to pray. All these excitements around us are only on the surface, real joy is not there. Some stimulus coming from outside and I feel excited. That is all the joy of today. That joy is not joy at all, because you want more and more stimulus. Somebody praises me, I become stimulated. But the next day that praise is not enough. I must have a little more praise. Little more, little more—I am waiting for it. That is no joy. No dependence! Real joy comes from within, because that is the infinite Atman, our true nature.

We are essentially Satchidananda, infinite knowledge and bliss is our nature. That infinite core of bliss is within you. Through the practice of love and bhakti a sense of joy comes. In the beginning it comes only occasionally. When you sit for meditation, prayer, or reciting a hymn, you feel a sense of joy. Then again the clouds come and cover the sun; everything is dismal later on. But by cultivating bhakti, by practising it, this joy becomes constant.

Bhakti from Childhood

Waiting till old age for heaven is wise. Don't try to go to heaven when you are young. When you are about to die, pay the priest some money, take a ticket, and go to heaven! That is perfectly fine: postmortem heaven! But if you want to live a life of holiness, start the practice of bhakti from childhood. There is a famous shloka in the Bhagavata:

> *Kaumāra ācaret prājño*
> *dharmān bhāgavatān-iha;*
> *Durlabhaṁ mānuṣaṁ janma*
> *tadapy-adhruvam-arthadam.*
>
> Wise ones will practise in this very life the Bhagavata dharma from childhood itself, because the human body is a rare acquisition, and also it is not permanent, but (when put to good use) is capable of producing great results.[6]

Let us practise bhakti when we are children. How to love—that is a wonderful teaching. Practise these great virtues and graces of the bhakti religion, the Bhagavata religion, *dharmān bhāgavatān*, from childhood. What a message for today's children! Our children have lost the capacity to love. Therefore, so many delinquencies are appearing even in childhood. I am giving an example. A newspaper in England—I was in Europe at that time—had the following news. In many towns there are colonies where old people live, retired old people. Early morning when the sun is out, they come out with their sticks for a little walk on the footpath or in some open space, and then go back again. Now, any person must feel great sympathy for these old people. They need

help. A harmonious civilization will try to help such people. But today's civilization is draining love from the heart, making us devils as it were. Imagine what happened! A number of young boys, who have lost all such human feelings, place a sort of net on the road, almost invisible, and these people trip and fall down, and the boys laugh. Imagine how low humanity can go. Other young people, finding the postman coming to the house to deliver a money order for these poor people, just smash a woman and take the money order away. These are all newspaper reports. I am only telling you that if children do not develop love in their hearts they become the curse of society, they become a problem to human civilization.

Prahlada said ages ago: *Kaumāra ācaret prājño dharmān bhāgavatān-iha*, these virtues and graces of bhakti must be cultivated in children, when they are young, not when they are old. Why? *Durlabhaṁ mānuṣaṁ janma*, this human body is a unique instrument, very rare. There are millions of species of insects, but humans are hardly 3,500 million [6,700 million now] in number. A single species of insect will be more numerous than that. The human being is very rare. Human birth is such a unique opportunity! And also nature has given us that capacity to raise our lives to a high level. Suppose you say, 'Alright, I shall practise bhakti when I become old and retired from everything.' That is a foolish notion. This life could go any moment. You don't know how long you will live. To make the best use of it, give the best of your life to the best of things in life.

As an English writer said: 'Don't give the logwood of your life to secondary matters and the chips to primary matters.' That is what we actually do. The chips of life we give to the highest and the logwood to flimsy matters. 'Don't do so,' says Prahlada. If you apply yourselves to this task from childhood, great will be the reward. A fulfilled life, a sense of joy, a sense of ecstasy throughout life—that is the message of bhakti. The boy Prahlada says further:

> *Na hyacyutaṁ prīṇayato bahvāyāso'surātmajāḥ;*
> *Ātmatvāt sarva-bhūtānāṁ siddhatvād-iha sarvataḥ.*
>
> Pleasing Achyuta, that is Hari, O children of the *asura*s, is not at all a hard or difficult proposition, because he is the one Self of all beings and is the Truth present everywhere, even now.

'O children of *asura*s! Pleasing Achyuta, pleasing Krishna, pleasing the Lord, is not at all difficult.' Why? *Ātmatvāt sarva-bhūtānām*, because he is the Self of all beings. He is not sitting somewhere in the sky. He is not a magistrate sitting there. He is your own. *Siddhatvād-iha sarvataḥ*, because, in every sense, it is an already attained fact in you; you have only to recognize it.

How simple the matter is. 'I am Mr So-and-so' doesn't need a mediate knowledge; it is immediate knowledge. See the difference between the two. Knowledge of something is mediate; this is immediate. I am Mary, I am David—this knowledge is immediate. Similarly, 'God is my infinite Self' is an immediate knowledge. That is how Vedanta presents religion as easy, not difficult. Only the mind has to be conditioned, that is all.

'Tomorrow we shall have God in our hearts' is not the teaching. Even now the Lord is here. Sri Ramakrishna said, 'God is in all men but all men are not in God; that is why they suffer.'[7] He is there just like a mother is there behind, in the house. The child is playing; he forgets there is a mother nearby and is frightened, starts crying. The mother is close by. You neglected her, you were busy with toys. Mother didn't neglect you; she is always there. In this way the bhakti religion gives us a profound philosophy and a beautiful technique to enrich human life. Invest it with joy and meaning and significance so that day-to-day life itself becomes a life of religion: a sense of joy, everything becomes suffused with joy. Then, we can understand that shloka which I recited in the beginning: *Nityotsavo bhavet-teṣāṁ*, when Hari is placed in the heart, every day becomes a festival.

That is the meaning of 'devotee'. '*Jiske hriday mein shri hari basey*' is a line from a Hindi song. It says: In whose heart Hari himself has taken position, what shall he lack? What a joy it will be! This is the nature of those great mystics who are full of joy. Rabia, a famous Muslim Sufi mystic of the eighth-

century Basra, was full of joy. She was a slave girl, later redeemed from slavery. She had no education, but you don't need education to realize what is your own. She became a great saint, influencing many great mystics thereafter. That was Rabia, full of joy.

Therefore, in this twentieth century, when everything around us simply marvels us—marvellous science, marvellous achievements—look at man: pitiable. In order to reverse this we need a new science, a science of man in depth. That is the science Vedanta developed ages ago and expressed in diverse ways so that all people can approach it and benefit from it.

It is just like when you prepare food, if diverse foods are cooked, everybody will get suitable food. Each one has his own taste, his own appetite, and his own stomach capacity. If only one type of food is cooked, many will go without real food. Vedanta, therefore, presented diverse types of eating materials: bhakti, jnana, karma, yoga, everything is there. Take what suits you. But, become rich, become pure, become fulfilled. When? In this very life, in this very body.

Nowhere will you find this teaching except in Vedanta. Be free in this very life, be fulfilled in this very life. Not after death, going to a heaven—that is a doubtful thing. We don't know what it is. Shall we miss this life and try to get something there? We say in English, 'A bird in hand is worth—not ten or hundred—a thousand in the bush.' You neglect this life and build up something elsewhere. That is foolishness, says our great bhakti tradition. Realize bhakti now, here itself.

This is a beautiful idea and a challenge to us. Can I conduct my life with that sense of joy? I can't purchase joy in the market. That is the foolishness of, what you call, modern thinking: those five dollars you pay, get some LSD, and get some joy. Joy comes without payment; it is your own. Try to manifest it in yourself. That is the nature of bhakti, a pure tradition—universal, meant for all people.

Young children today will appreciate religion if parents have joy in their lives and deal with them accordingly. They will become positive, they will become enriched, and they will become humanized thereby. That humanizing is promised by the science of bhakti. A man is not a man without love in the heart. Humanizing cannot come without love filling the human heart. That kind of humanizing process becomes accelerated when this bhakti tradition becomes more widely known. Then this ideal of ecstasy in daily life will be realized more and more by more and more people. It becomes a current coin later on. That is the hope we have. It is for this that great teachers come. Jesus came and gave joy to millions of people. Krishna did it for ages. Buddha did it. Ramakrishna comes today and the same idea is expressed in a language and style which you and I can understand today. That is the meaning of this great theme: 'Ecstasy in daily life.'

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6. Bhagavata, 7.6.1.
7. *Sayings of Sri Ramakrishna* (Madras: Ramakrishna Math, 1971), 274.

(*Continued from page 428*)

The poet's main focus is on the cultural behaviour of the devotees. Even while describing the urban life at Srivilliputtur and Madhura—with their houses, streets, and gardens—the poet's focus is mainly on the devotees, their religious discourses, and their impact on people, including kings. Krishnadeva Raya's main doctrine seems to gravitate towards the need for human beings to follow the different dharmas of life according to their social position—grihastha, raja—or their natural constitution—bhakta, yogi, and the like. These dharmas, properly accomplished, make complete human beings and such people are eligible for liberation. This is the concept of spirituality well expressed in *Amuktamalyada* through such characters as Vishnuchitta, Yamunacharya, Khandikya, Keshidhwaja, Maladasari, and finally the unique Godadevi, characters that are still alive in the feelings of the Telugu-speaking people.

The Many-splendoured Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Vedanta – VIII

Dr M Sivaramkrishna

One of the fascinating tributes in the Sri Ramakrishna birth centenary number of *Prabuddha Bharata* is from Nicholas de Roerich. Described by the editor as 'one of the leading figures of the world in contemporary cultural life', Roerich points out that in the hot and dusty deserts of Mongolia, 'while already returning to the camp, we noticed in the distance a huge elm-tree—"Karagateh," lonely towering amidst the surrounding endless desert'. This tree reminded him 'especially ... of the huge banyan trees of India'. And, this association, he says, evoked in him the 'great achievements of India'.[1]

It is in such a locale that his 'thoughts turned to the radiant giant of India—Sri Ramakrishna'. How the Great Master mysteriously appears in unlikely ways and places is what he finds interesting. He says:

> We recollect how in various countries has grown the understanding of the radiant Teaching of Ramakrishna. Beyond shameful words of hatred, beyond evil mutual destruction—the word of Bliss, which is close to every human heart, spreads wildly like the mighty branches of the sacred banyan tree. On the paths of human searching, these calls of goodwill were shining like beacons. We ourselves witnessed and have often heard how books of Ramakrishna's Teaching were as if unexpectedly found by sincere seekers. We ourselves came across the book in a most unusual way (121–2).

This is nothing but truth. Books and articles on the Great Master apart, the very way in which they surface is fascinating.

It was 26 July last year. I was halfway through a book titled *The Life We Are Given* by George Leonard and Michael Murphy. George Leonard, I learnt, is founder of the Human Potential Movement, and Michael Murphy co-founder of California's famed Esalen Institute. Both are remarkable figures in the new awakening of spirituality in the US, as an integral part of globalization. And the book itself is remarkable: Ken Wilber, an oft-heard name in consciousness studies, described it as 'a powerful, compelling, comprehensive approach to individual transformation and community enrichment'.

Even as I started reading it, I felt halfway through, that there must be some reference to the Great Master. The overall tone, tenor, and themes of the book were so *naturally* holistic and integral that I was certain that at some place or other 'Ramakrishna' should surely appear. Sure enough, in no time, I found a reference. The authors quoted Ramakrishna on 'grace' in the chapter entitled 'Catching the Winds of Grace: More on Affirmations'. And the quote reads: 'The winds of grace are always blowing,' the Indian mystic Ramakrishna said. 'But we have to raise our sails.'[2]

Such is the grace which makes miracles so natural!

Questions and Answers on Hinduism

Compact and reader-friendly introductions to 'major' religious traditions are very popular these days. Apart from, for instance, the 'Short Introduction' series by Oxford University Press, there are interesting books on the subject from various publishing houses. One such, curiously enough, is called *101 Questions and Answers on Hinduism*, a series which includes comparable volumes on Islam and Buddhism. Curious because, why 101? And this question remains unanswered. These are authored by John Renard who, we are told, is a long-

time scholar of Eastern religions with a PhD from Harvard; he is presently a professor of theological studies at St Louis University.

The questions and answers are arranged in nine sections and take the reader from the beginning and early sources, through history and development, law and ethics, spirituality, humanity, women and family, and such other topics, to the state of Hinduism—here and now. And 'Ramakrishna', 'Vivekananda', the 'Ramakrishna Movement', and 'Vedanta Society' appear in more than one section. The Great Master appears as an answer to the question 'Have there been any other major Hindu religious leaders in modern times?' 'Several very important figures associated with modern Hindu revival movements, sometimes called neo-Hinduism stand out,' says the author. And Ramakrishna, 'experienced as he was in all of Hinduism's main spiritual methods from karma to tantra', 'experimented with devotional aspects of both Islam and Christianity and decided that any religion could be a path to God.'[3]

The next figure to be noticed in this entry is Swami Vivekananda. After the brief biographical details and the encounter with the Great Master, John Renard says: 'Some believe his work first made it possible for modern Hindus to understand their tradition as a unified whole offering a full range of spiritual possibilities, each tailored to specific needs and capabilities.' In short, he 'envisioned Hinduism, the "mother of all religions", as the hope for a unified world, and taught that Buddha and Christ were, along with Krishna and Ramakrishna, divine avatars'. Renard also notes that Swamiji influenced Sri Ramakrishna 'greatly'. Renard recommends Chetanananda's *Voice of Freedom* as 'an excellent survey of Vivekananda's thought' (141).

Encyclopaedia of the World's Religions

Next is a reference book: *Encyclopedia of the World's Religions*. Edited by the celebrated scholar R C Zaehner, it is a solid book of 456 pages. It is introduced as 'an indispensable tool for all students of comparative religion and for anyone intrigued by the enduring impact of religion upon humanity.'[4] It is divided into two parts entitled 'Prophecy' and 'Wisdom'. The former 'covers religions of prophetic revelation, with sections devoted to Judaism, Christianity, Islam and Zoroastrianism.' And the second part is devoted to what are called 'wisdom' religions, by which the editor implies 'those whose fundamental teachings do not necessarily emanate from a divine source'. These are Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism, Shinto, Taoism, and Sikhism. The two parts contain essays by experts in these areas; some are well known: Zaehner himself, A L Basham, I B Horner, and H A R Gibb.

The observations on Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda are by A L Basham in the course of his general survey of Hinduism as a 'wisdom' religion. Professor Basham points out that one of the characteristics of Hinduism, 'at least in its higher manifestations, is its tendency to reduce all apparent differences to a single entity or principle'. Even though 'it is not true to say that monism is universal in Indian religious thought, ... it is monism that gives Indian thought much of its characteristic flavour' (217). And in this context he cites 'Ramakrishna's famous dictum that "all religious are one"' (218). However, Sri Ramakrishna also affirmed the other side of the coin 'as many faiths, so many paths'; and Swami Vivekananda declared that each must grow according to its own laws of growth.

Sri Ramakrishna's influence on the ethos of his time was 'an even more important influence' than that of, for instance, Swami Dayananda and Annie Besant. Expanding the Great Master's message of unity, Basham says: Ramakrishna, 'the saintly mystic', studied 'other religions, temporarily putting himself in the position of an earnest member of the other faith, reading only the appropriate scriptures, reciting the appropriate prayers and following the appropriate spiritual discipline'. The result is the experimental affirmation of 'all religions are one' as a fact. In short, 'all led back to the same truth which was perceived by the mystic—the oneness of all things in the Universal Spirit' (249).

It is this 'deepening of the national religious

consciousness and a further growth of pride in the Hindu religious tradition' (250), that led Vivekananda to establish the Ramakrishna Mission, which marks, says Basham, 'an important stage in the growth of the Hindu social conscience' (ibid.).

Basham also highlights the caution necessary in declaring naively that 'Hindu culture is essentially spiritual while that of the West is essentially materialistic' (251). Perhaps, this notion was a feature of the ethos of colonial rubbishing of Hindu faith as animistic and stratified and the reactions it evoked. Also, the neglect of ethical and religious values in the name of development has cost us heavily in the present environment of economic recession and corruption, where privatizing the profit and socializing the losses seems to be the norm. In such a context, fundamentalism is not necessarily or exclusively religious. Any assertion of exclusive possession of Truth is in its very nature an explosive threat.

It is under these circumstances that one has to draw a distinction between insights that are useful but dated—Basham's pioneering study needs updating—and insights that arise from the post-globalized ethos. Religions exist now in an atmosphere of intensive intellectual scrutiny that draws from the postmodern views of texts and traditions. And these views 'construct' religions and are curious but cautious about questions of transcendence. Even 'Indian' scholars with evident inwardness in their religion are generally on the horns of a dilemma: hunting with the hound of scholarly neutrality and running with the hare of individual faith. This results in an uneasy tone of writing.

As an instance, one can cite the meticulously researched and cautiously articulated study by Dr Sharada Sugirtharajah. A lecturer in Hindu studies at the University of Birmingham, her book 'introduces a new and significant way of looking at Western construction of Hinduism'; she does this by 'employing current postcolonial categories' which obviously are 'manufactured on Western categorizations'.[5] Thus, orientalism and its proponents experienced 'a complex and ambivalent fascination with Hinduism, responding to it in ways ranging from admiration to ridicule' (ibid.). Dr Sharada tries to clarify: 'It is ironic that in the 1993 celebration of the Parliament of Religions held at Chicago, the VHP should hail Vivekananda as a champion of militant Hinduism; although he did not favour the kind of militancy proposed by contemporary Hindu nationalists. My point is that whatever Vivekananda might have said, he certainly did not ask Hindus to demolish places of worship.' In support of this, Dr Sharada cites Tapan Raychaudhuri—one of the most balanced of contemporary thinkers in this area—who says: 'It is difficult to imagine him [Vivekananda] as the ideological ancestor of people who incite the ignorant to destroy other people's places of worship in a revanchist spirit' (137).

This is, indeed, a refreshing rebuttal of attempts to politicize Swamiji. Another important aspect Dr Sharada discusses is 'the ideology of *bhakti*', which 'challenges the orthodox brahminical rulings on women'. Implicit here is the questioning of the ideal of *pativrata* and related conventions. Dr Sharada comments on this issue with clarity and sensitivity, taking from Holy Mother's life: 'For a more traditional example,' other than, for instance, women saints such as Akka Mahadevi and Meera, 'one can turn to Sarada Devi, wife of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa (a nineteenth-century Bengali saint), who followed the path of *stridharma*, but did not become a *sati.* Ramakrishna looked upon her as a spiritual partner, taught her the sacred mantras and how to initiate people into them. After his death, she became the spiritual guide to Ramakrishna's disciples, both monks and lay people' (129). Dr Sharada's study is, by and large, remarkably free from the usual stereotyped postmodern and post-colonial critiques of Hinduism.

Initiation

The entries covered in this instalment highlight some interesting responses to Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Vedanta: Roerich responds in terms of creative spirituality, with its mysterious ways of appearing in various cultures and climes and

radiating its impact in felt ways. Next, is the core of 'grace' as the fulcrum of inner life getting actualized, depending on our willingness to receive it. The other entries are, on the whole, scholarly and academic. I had to bypass some observations that are dated now. But they have immense value, because the Ramakrishna tradition has activism as one of its wings. In the present strife (political), and stress (economic, social, and political), even the ethical core of concern for the other and restraint—if not total renunciation—of compulsive fulfilment of all wants and desires, is a helpful way to achieving mental and environmental balance.

Finally, let me conclude by citing an instance that affirms the vibrant living presence of the Great Master as an experienced fact—something that rescues us from the academic and cerebral insights which have, of course, their own invaluable place. This is from *Initiation*, written by Dr Michael Miovic, an attending psychiatrist at Harvard Medical School, Boston. He specializes in the field of integral health and consciousness studies. *Initiation* is a fascinating study of these areas, besides containing some narratives on his travels to various pilgrim centres in India. An ardent follower of Sri Aurobindo, he writes with great insight. When he visited the temple of the Great Master in Belur Math, he 'believes' that he had 'an experience [that] represented the light of the higher Truth Consciousness which Ramakrishna brought down into the world-heart'. The other surprising coincidence was his son's experience: 'The atmosphere was charged. Hundreds of people mingled there quietly, stopping in front of the saint to make pranams and offerings. Varun, our 9 year-old, suddenly blurted out in amazement "Look, he's breathing—he has the life force".'[6]

'A curious statement', says Dr Miovic, 'from an American kid whose main preoccupations were Gameboy and finding a McDonald's in India. ... But Varun was absolutely right.' The 'statue seemed to ripple and breathe, and indeed, one had the sense that the Paramahamsa was there' (ibid.). Naturally, one recalls Sister Devamata's experience as recorded in her deeply moving article 'The Living Presence':

> They were not dreams, they were not imaginations, nor was the Great One who came in them an apparition. He was a pulsing Presence, a living personality. The warmth and radiance of his being were clearly perceptible; and in my being also, when the Presence came, there was a peculiar unaccustomed glow. It was as if a bright light was flashed on in every atom of my mind and heart and even in the body. Sometimes the glow preceded the Presence, as if to herald its approach; sometimes it came with it; but always its influence lingered after for hours and even days.[7]

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(*Continued from page 435*)

6. Elizabeth C Stanton, Susan B Anthony, Matilda J Gage, Ida H Harper, *History of Woman Suffrage* (Fowler & Wells, 1881), 20.
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8. Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* (New York: Modern Library), 24.
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Narada Bhakti Sutra

Swami Bhaskareswarananda

(*Continued from the previous issue*)

57. Uttarasmād-uttarasmāt pūrva-pūrvā śreyāya bhavati.

The preceding one [*type of preparatory bhakti*] *is superior to the succeeding, in that order.*

The sattvic bhakta is quickest in attaining pure bhakti because he is calm and his ego is not dynamic. Although his bhakti might be dualistic to begin with, as he proceeds on the path sincerely, he feels as 'part of the whole', and finally experiences: 'not I but Thou'. The rajasic bhakta proceeds less fast, because his ego is dominant and there is attraction towards the world. The tamasic bhakta also reaches the goal, but much later. Laziness and fanaticism is removed from him by the force of his love. He must simply love God and not bother about his imperfections, which will be removed as he gradually evolves.

Among the four types of devotees—*ārta*, *jijñāsu*, *arthārthin*, and *jñānin*—the *ārta* quickly goes towards God because the reaction to pain and suffering makes his love intense. The *jijñāsu* does not have such intensity; yet, because his curiosity is about God and not about worldly matters, he proceeds towards God, though less rapidly. The *arthārthin* proceeds most slowly because his love for God is mixed up with attraction for the world. But even he will evolve.

Thus, Narada's stress here is on the efficacy of love for God. He wants to remove any sense of despair and depression from all sadhakas who may not be fit for *parā bhakti* and also inspire them to love God in whichever way or for whatever reason.

58. Anyasmāt saulabhyaṁ bhaktau.

Bhakti is easier than other paths.

Love and attraction is naturally present in every human being, though it might be distorted. Since love is most natural and most powerful, the path of bhakti too is most natural. Swami Vivekananda also says this. The path of jnana postulates: '*Brahma satyaṁ jagat mithyā*; Brahman is real and the world is illusory.' But our experience says: '*Jagat satyaṁ brahma mithyā*; the world is real and Brahman is unreal.' So the path of jnana is psychologically difficult. But love is self-evident, you can't deny it.

59. Pramāṇāntarasyānapekṣatvāt svayaṁ pramāṇatvāt (ca).

It [*bhakti*] *does not require any other proof,* (*and*) *because it is a proof in itself.*

Since it is self evident, love does not require such outside proofs like *pratyakṣa*, *anumāna*, *upamāna*, or *arthāpatti* to establish its existence. You may not 'see' love by dissecting the body, but it is there. It is a matter of direct experience. With this conviction, the sadhaka's whole being vibrates and responds to bhakti.

60. Śānti-rūpāt paramānanda-rūpācca.

Also because it [*bhakti*] *is of the nature of peace and supreme bliss.*

Now Narada shows another intrinsic beauty and efficacy of bhakti. *Śānti*, peace, is the very nature of divine love. Even in human love there is always an experience of inner solace. But human love is

The text comprises the edited notes of Swami Bhaskareswarananda's classes on the *Narada Bhakti Sutra*, taken down by some residents of the Ramakrishna Math, Nagpur. The classes were conducted between 17 December 1965 and 24 January 1966.

invariably subject to frustration and reaction. This is not the case with divine love, in which the object of love is the eternal Reality. The very nature of divine love is such that it makes the sadhaka transcend the subject-object realism and experience real peace automatically. *Aśānti* means reaction due to considering the world of subject and object as real. Peace is the very nature of divine love. It is not like the peace of the world, which is the effect of some cause and consequently cannot last. Neither is it the after-effect of the enjoyment of some object, which will necessarily disappear. Ananda is the very nature of the divinity in man, and divine love is nothing but the *prakāśa*, expression, of this divinity.

Thus Narada assures and encourages the sadhaka that he must not bother about his imperfections, about dualism, or about reactions, and go on practising bhakti. He will find how his ego melts progressively and his separate identity and imperfections gradually vanish due the intrinsic force of bhakti.

61. Lokahānau cintā na kāryā, niveditātma-loka-vedatvāt.

A devotee must not bother about social loss, having surrendered oneself and one's social and religious duties and interests to the Lord.

It has been told by Narada that the sadhaka must live in communion with God. But it is also an undeniable fact that he has to live in the world, which is not to his liking. He must know the science of living in the world so that he may achieve illumination, otherwise his life will be a failure.

If the sadhaka thinks that he will perform sadhana after circumstances become completely favourable, he will have to wait till eternity, just like a person waiting for the sea to become calm before taking a bath in it. The world naturally causes disturbances, but it has no reality of its own. Therefore, the only way to remain undisturbed is to resign oneself to the absolute Reality. Surrender is the special science of adjustment in the world necessary for spiritual success.

As long as there is this little 'I', there will be effort to satisfy it. But this 'I' has no absolute reality. So, surrender your ego to Him totally. All daily activities—*loka vyāpāra*—and all special activities—*veda vyāpāra*—based on the ego must be dedicated to Bhagavan. Our inconveniences in the world are generally the inconveniences of the small ego. There is no limit to the cravings of the little ego, which can never be satisfied. Hence, surrender of the 'I' to the Divine will automatically bring tranquillity.

62. Na tat-siddhau loka-vyavahāro heyaḥ kintu phalatyāgaḥ tat-sādhanaṁ ca (kāryameva).

For the attainment of bhakti, social life need not be shunned, but fruits of action must be surrendered and activities helpful to bhakti (must be performed).

The spirit of resignation does not come due to the little 'ego', the individual self, which makes the mind dirty. This must be cleansed. How? By doing karma in the proper spirit. Giving up karma is not the answer. Narada says, do karma without the consideration of *phala*, fruit. The mind will thus become increasingly transparent and the light of the absolute Reality will be reflected spontaneously in it. The pure mind is the instrument for total resignation to the divine will. Resignation alone will make your mind free from *cintā*, tribulation due to the world.

But this is not enough. Since you have to undertake selfless works in the world, you must not forget to follow sadhana, spiritual disciplines. Unselfish work, together with spiritual disciplines, will purify the mind and lead to resignation, bhakti, and ultimate realization.

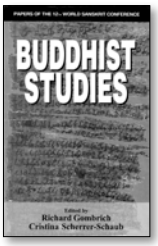
(*To be continued*)

Haste, Oh haste with the garland
Bind His feet;
Encircle, gather round, follow and leave not,
Clasp Him, tho' He eludes.
The incomparable One trumpeted His coming
Made me His Own—
A sage He came and showed Himself to me.

—Manikkavachakar

REVIEWS

For review in PRABUDDHA BHARATA,
publishers need to send ***two*** *copies of their latest publications.*



Buddhist Studies
Ed. Richard Gombrich and Cristina Scherrer-Schaub

Motilal Banarsidass, 41 U A Bungalow Road, Jawahar Nagar, Delhi 110 007. E-mail: *mlbd@vsnl.com*. 2008. xii + 264 pp. Rs 600.

This is the eighth volume of the sectional papers presented at the twelfth World Sanskrit Conference held at Helsinki, Finland, from 13 to 18 July 2003. A section-wise publication of papers presented at the conference is a welcome step taken by the authorities of the conference.

The first paper in the present volume is by Guilio Agostini and is titled 'Partial *Upāsaka*s'. It deals with *upasaka*s, spiritual practitioners, who have taken certain vows as followers of the Buddhist religion and have declared their surrender to the Buddha, to the Dharma, and to the Sangha. Apart from this triple surrender, *upasaka*s have to follow, in full or in part, other tenets of Buddhism. The *upasaka*s may not be bhikkhus, but they play a vital role in promoting the religion of Buddha all the same. Partial *upasaka*s are those lay followers 'who do not take—or take less than—five precepts'. The paper presents various texts to support the categorization of the *upasaka*s.

The second paper, the longest in this compilation, is by Juo-Hsüeh Bhikkhuni. It presents a comparative study of rules regarding acceptance of gold and silver by a votary of Buddhism. The rules in this regard are laid down in various *Vinaya* texts, there being separate rules for monks and lay followers. Ten prohibitory rules are enumerated in the *Culla Vagga*. The tenth among these is *jātarūparajat*: give up gold or silver. These rules were often reviewed in the historical Buddhist councils. The scholar presents here various extracts from canonical literature about acceptance or non-acceptance of gold and silver by a bhikkhu or a subordinate preacher.

Ilona Manevskaia's short paper discusses the compositional methods used by Haribhadra in his *Abhisamayālaṁkāra-ālokā*. In India, great attention was paid to the rules of textual composition, both poetic and Shastric. Haribhadra was a Buddhist scholar under the Pala kings (c. 8th cent.) and a pupil of Acharya Shantarakshita. Manevskaia examines the text with reference to the four *anubandha*s—i) *Sambandha*, connection; ii) *Abhidheya*, subject matter; iii) *Prayojana*, purpose; and iv) *Prayojana-prayojana*, purpose of purpose—and also refers to the exegetical techniques of the *Yuktidipika* (c. 7th cent.) and *Nyayabhashya* (c. 5th cent.). The five appendices included here would prove useful for those interested in the study of this ancient methodology of philosophical writing.

Marek Mejor traces the direct dependence on or close relation to the formulations of Vasubandhu's *Abhidharmakosha* (c. 5th cent.) noticeable in texts of such philosophical schools as Samkhya, Nyaya, Vaisheshika, and Vedanta. Jason Neelis presents a study of the *avadana*s, 'noble deeds', in the *Kharoshthi* manuscripts belonging to the British Library. The paper focuses on geographical and historical contexts of nine *avadana*s in these fragmented manuscripts.

Surprisingly, the last three papers are not indexed in the contents page. The first of these is by Sundari Siddhartha and deals with the 'Psalm of Sundari' in the *Therigatha*. Events in this psalm are woven around seven characters. All of them indicate that people from any strata of society can seek spiritual salvation.

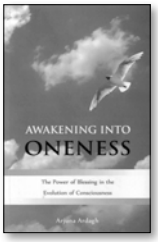
The most appealing paper in the entire collection is by Przemyslaw Szczurek: '*Prajñāvādāṁś ca bhāṣase*: Polemics with Buddhism in the Early Parts of the *Bhagavadgītā*'. It is a fine study of the philosophical concepts in the Bhagavadgita vis-à-vis Buddhist philosophical texts. The author has attempted an analysis of various layers of thought—epic, Samkhya, didactic, yogic, Upanishadic—and of bhakti texts as well. The text compares the writings of three interpreters of the Gita—R C Zaehner, K N Jayatilleke, and K M Upadhyaya—by juxtaposing similarities and adverse views in their writings.

The last paper in this collection is by P C Verhagen, titled 'Studies in Indo-Tibetan Buddhist Hermeneutics (6): Validity and Valid Interpretation of

Scripture according to Vasubandhu's *Vyākhyāyukti*'. The paper deals with hermeneutical and expository techniques for comparative interpretation of Buddhist and other texts.

These eight papers present substantial material to serious readers of Buddhist philosophy.

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Awakening into Oneness
Arjuna Ardagh

Indus Source Books, PO Box 6194, Malabar Hill, Mumbai 400 006. E-mail: *info@indussource.com*. 2007. xiv + 210 pp.Rs 299.

The subject of consciousness has interested humanity right from the dawn of civilization. In earlier days it used to be the province of mystics, philosophers, shamans, and occasionally psychologists. But of late it has been attracting the attention of many other professionals and seekers, both intellectual and spiritual. None, however, has been able to define 'consciousness' unambiguously. This book is also about consciousness, exploring it from the viewpoint of evolution. Since the book talks about *diksha* and meditation, one can surmise that the word 'consciousness' is used in its Vedantic sense. It deals with a new movement that has arisen recently in Hyderabad—earlier called the Kalki movement, it is now apparently renamed 'Oneness movement'.

Going through the book one gets the sense of *déjà vu*. It deals with a subject that appears essentially the same as *shaktipat* as mentioned in the books of the Varkari Sampradaya of Maharashtra. The latter practice has recently been revived through the efforts of Swami Nityananda, Swami Muktananda, and Swami Chidvilasananda. The publications of this Siddha Yoga group from Ganeshpuri provide details of the subject. *Awakening into Oneness* seems to talk about the same thing, though in different words. What is called *diksha* here is essentially the same as *shaktipat*, by which process a guru can arouse an aspirant's spiritual consciousness and cause it to move from lower to the highest planes. There are innumerable examples of this in Indian spiritual literature. Vyasa did this for Sanjaya at the time of the Mahabharata war. Sri Krishna granted this 'divine eye' to Arjuna so that he could see the cosmic form of the Divine. In more recent times Sri Ramakrishna raised Narendranath's consciousness to verify his own visions concerning the young man. Again, towards the end of his life, Sri Ramakrishna transferred the fruits of all his sadhana to Narendranath by merely looking at him steadfastly.

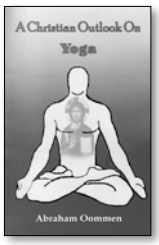
What, then, is unique about this book? This is what intrigued me when I started reading it. The book promises much. Whether it has delivered all that it promises is purely a matter of opinion. We live in an age of scepticism. The modern generation is not prepared to accept anything unless there is incontrovertible proof. Even Swami Vivekananda was of the opinion that scriptural statements should be subjected to the same kind of rigorous questioning as the material sciences. The book fails to deliver in this respect. Though there is some mention of the activities of the brain during supernormal experiences, there are no references to results from controlled experiments. Such experiments, called 'application of the Einstein-Podolsky-Rosen paradox to the human brain and consciousness', have been carried out in Mexico and the United States. But even these have been inconclusive.

The book abounds in case histories from around the world. These have been grouped together under distinct categories—health, family life, art, business, and the like. In themselves they provide interesting matter for study, because anything capable of relieving human suffering is worth a study. But if a proper and systematic analysis is carried out—as has been done, and is being done, in the fields of yoga and Ayurveda—it would add so much more to credibility.

The author acknowledges that such controlled experiments, leading to verifiable results, are yet to be done. In the absence of these one can only reserve judgment and say with Hamlet: 'There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy.'

Dr N V C Swamy
Dean of Academic Programmes
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Bangalore

BOOK RECEIVED



A Christian Outlook on Yoga
Abraham Oommen

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A thoughtful inclusive study of Sankhya, Yoga, and the Hesychasm from a Christian perspective.

REPORTS



Swami Smarananandaji in the function at Aurangabad

News from Branch Centres

On 3 April 2009 Swami Vagishananda inaugurated the upgraded and renovated Ma Sarada Physiotherapy and Cerebral Palsy Rehabilitation Centre of the charitable dispensary at **Ramakrishna Ashrama**, **Rajkot**.



Rehabilitation Centre at Rajkot

Srimat Swami Prameyanandaji Maharaj, Vice President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, inaugurated the newly constructed extension to the monks' quarters, Premananda Bhavan, at **Ramakrishna Math**, **Antpur**, on 10 April.

The second floor of the higher secondary school building at **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama**, **Malda**, was inaugurated on 15 April.

A seven-foot statue of Swami Vivekananda was installed at the higher secondary school of **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama**, **Cherrapunji**, on 15 April.

Srimat Swami Smarananandaji Maharaj, Vice President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, inaugurated the newly constructed library building at **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama**, **Jalpaiguri**, on 22 April.

Srimat Swami Smarananandaji laid the foundation stone for the proposed temple at **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama**, **Aurangabad**, on 10 April.

Ramakrishna Math, **Sikra-Kulingram**, celebrated the golden jubilee of its temple with a devotees' convention, a public meeting, and cultural programmes from 21 to 27 April. About 200 monastics and more than 5,000 devotees attended the programmes.

Srimat Swami Smarananandaji inaugurated the newly built extension to the monks' quarters at **Ramakrishna Mission Hospital**, **Itanagar**, on 8 May. The centre celebrated its 30th anniversary on 10 and 11 May. Gen. (Retd) J J Singh, Governor, Arunachal Pradesh, inaugurated the new out patient department block of the hospital. Swami Smarananandaji declared open a new building housing the intensive care unit, the intensive cardiac care unit, and the eye ward. He also presided over the public meeting, addressed by several distinguished speakers. Many monks and dignitaries attended the celebration.

Inauguration of the new outpatient department at Itanagar





Distribution of food to victims of Cyclone Aila, by Belur Math

Relief

Cyclone Aila Relief · Cyclone Aila, which hit West Bengal on 25 May, caused heavy rains and floods, washing away roads and submerging villages. Thousands of people were severely affected; a large number of them lost their houses and took shelter in schools, clubs, and on the roadside. Our centres immediately started extensive primary relief operations in the affected areas. **Bankura** centre supplied bamboos and roof tiles to 15 cyclone-affected families. **Belgharia** centre is distributing chira, sugar, halogen tablets, bleaching powder, and other items to thousands of victims at Gosaba block in South 24-Parganas district. **Manasadwip** centre distributed 6,000 kg chira, 1,500 kg sugar, 40 kg biscuits, 25 kg milk powder, 5,000 ORS packets, and 50,000 halogen tablets to 13,769 victims at Sagar, Pathar Pratima, and Namkhana blocks in South 24-Parganas district. **Narendrapur** centre is distributing tarpaulins, chira, molasses, rice, dal, drinking water, ORS packets, halogen tablets, bleaching powder, and hygiene kits to thousands of victims at Gosaba, Kakdwip, Kultali, Namkhana, Pathar Pratima, and Sagar blocks in South 24-Parganas district. **Rahara** centre distributed 6,000 kg chira, 1,000 kg sugar, 44 kg milk powder, 72 kg biscuits, 1,400 l mineral water, and 150,000 halogen tablets to 16,470 victims at 12 villages of Sandeshkhali I and II blocks in North 24-Parganas district; besides, the centre distributed different kinds of medicines to 575 cyclone-affected patients. **Saradapitha** centre is rendering medical relief to cyclone-affected patients at Sandeshkhali and Hingalganj blocks in North 24-Parganas district; besides, the centre renovated 1 dispensary building and 10 houses in 3 villages of Minakha block, North 24-Parganas district, affected in a previous cyclone. **Sikra-Kulingram** centre is distributing chira, molasses, biscuits, milk powder, and halogen tablets to thousands of victims at Sandeshkhali I block in North 24-Parganas district. **Swamiji's Ancestral House** is distributing chira, molasses, rice, dal, edible oil, biscuits, drinking water, and plastic sheets to 2,000 victims at 4 villages in Sandeshkhali block, North 24-Parganas district. **Taki** centre is distributing chira, molasses, milk powder, biscuits, and halogen tablets to thousands of victims at Sandeshkhali and Hingalganj blocks in North 24-Parganas district.

Refugee Relief · Sri Lanka's long civil war, which ended recently, has left tens of thousands of civilians stranded in camps, in dire need of food, water, and medical attention. **Colombo** centre distributed 900 kg nutritious food powder, 621 kg milk powder, 310 kg butter, 1,242 tubes of toothpaste, 854 toothbrushes, 2,484 soap bars, and 1,029 sets of clothes to 1,029 war-victims who have taken shelter at a refugee camp in Kodikamam area in Jaffna.

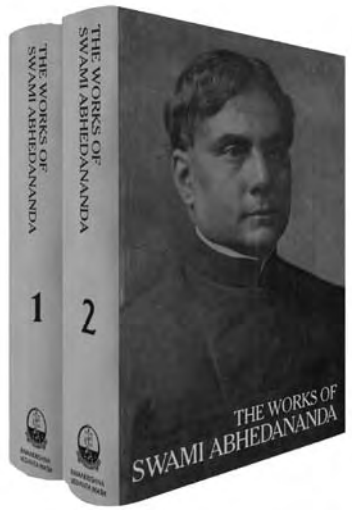
Fire Relief · **Nattarampalli** centre distributed rice, provisions, utensils, mats, and other items to 2 families whose houses had been gutted by fire at Gundalamalaiyur, a nearby tribal area.

Distress Relief · The following centres distributed various items to the needy in their respective areas: **Belgaum**: 375 kg rice, 375 kg flour, 75 kg dal, and 75 kg edible oil; **Belgharia**: 222 saris, 190 dhotis, 278 pants, 270 shirts, 547 children's garments, and 60 kg milk powder; **Swamiji's Ancestral House:** 10 blankets, 125 saris, 150 children's garments, and other items.

Economic Rehabilitation · **Saradapitha** centre distributed, under self-employment programme, 7 rickshaws to needy people. PB

Cyclone Aila Relief Fund

The Ramakrishna Mission appeals to one and all to contribute generously to the flood relief fund. All donations to 'Ramakrishna Mission' are exempt from income tax under section 80-G of the Income Tax Act. Donations may please be sent to: The General Secretary, Ramakrishna Mission, Belur Math, Howrah, WB 711 202 (Ph: +91 33 2654 9581 / 9681; Fax: 2654 9885; E-mail: *rkmrelief@gmail.com*; Website: *www.belurmath.org/relief*).



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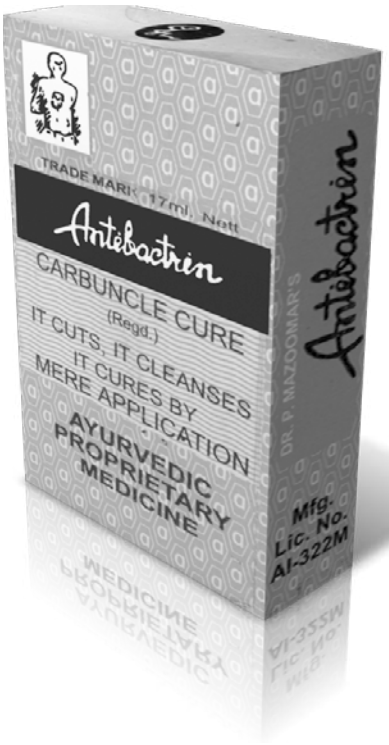
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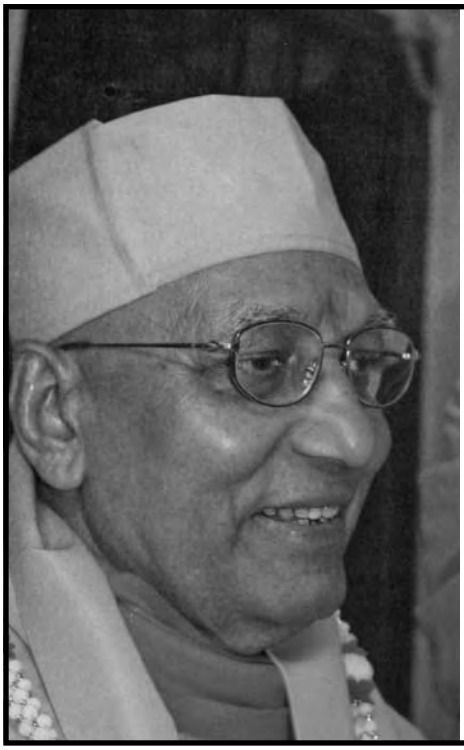
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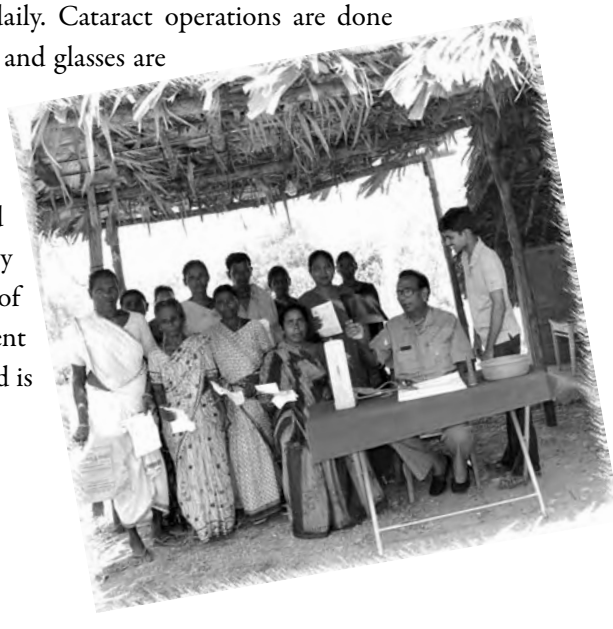
WE WANT TO BE HEALTHY, WON'T YOU HELP US?



This **Mobile Dispensary** for tribals was started in 1985 on a small-scale and at present has two vehicles, two doctors, and 8 medical and non-medical staff. It is also equipped with X-ray, ECG, and laboratory. The medical team visits various tribal areas four times a week from Thursday to Sunday. They stay at the base camp provided by the Integrated Tribal Development Agency at Rampachodavaram, a place 53 kms away from Rajahmundry. Nearly 1,500 patients are visiting the camps weekly. We have treated 60,000 patients from April 2008 to March 2009, giving medicines free of cost.



There is a **laboratory** at the base camp at Rampachodavaram having all modern equipment. TB patients are treated under RNTCP-DOT scheme and nutritious food is provided to them. Interesting programmes for educating people about various diseases are conducted. Frequent camps by specialists and eye-camps are conducted with an attendance of more than 1000 patients daily. Cataract operations are done with IOL lenses and glasses are provided free of charge.



Present Needs: Owing to the steep rise in the prices and insufficient donations, it has become very difficult to carry on the service activities in a smooth manner. The number of patients also is on the increase. The amount of government grants is not commensurable to the expenses incurred and is not always available.

You can help us: To overcome this problem of paucity of funds, we appeal to all our friends, well wishers, devotees, and public institutions, private and corporate business houses to come forward to help us to continue the service to poor. This help will go a long way in continuing our service activities without any disruption in future.



You can help by: Donating some amount to create a permanent fund of Rs 50 lakhs, (Minimum Amount Rs 10,000/-) or Donating some amount regularly as per our annual budget given below.



OUR NEEDS

Nature of Expenditure	Annual Expenditure (Rs)
Medicines	12,00,000
Salaries	8,00,000
Fuel and maintenance	70,000
Food for TB patients	25,000
Printing and stationery	10,000
Eye camp expenses	20,000
Specialist camps	40,000
General repairs	10,000
Electricity expenses	25,000
Postage and telephone	10,000
Petty equipment	5,000
Miscellaneous	5,000
Grand Total	22,20,000

All the donations to Ramakrishna Mission, Rajahmundry are exempted from Income tax under Section 80 G. Cheques /Demand Drafts may be made out in favour of '*Ramakrishna Mission, Rajahmundry*'.

Swami Aksharatmananda, Secretary

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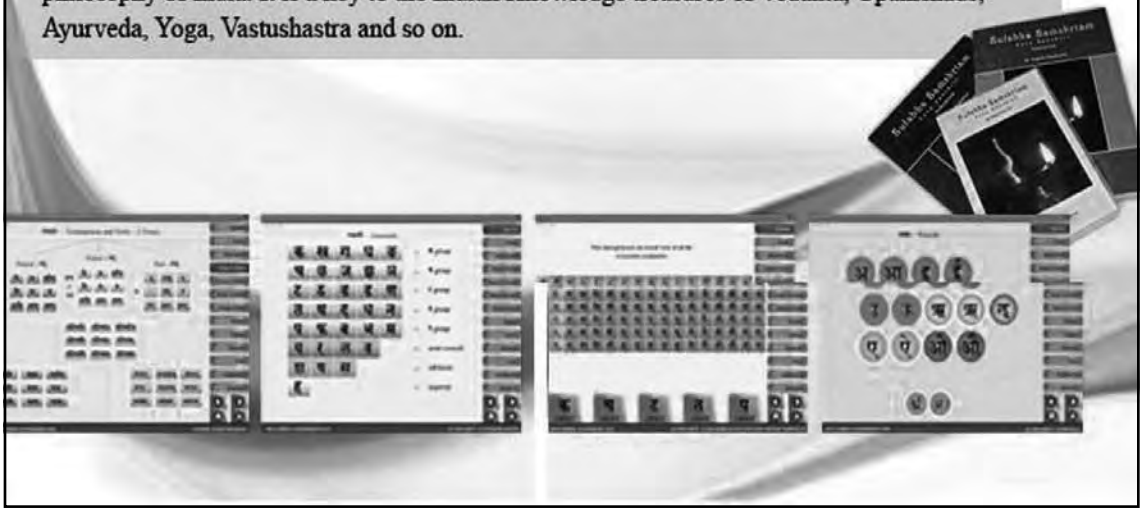
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Madurai city, the abode of Divine Mother Sri Meenakshi, is a great pilgrim centre of South India. Sri Ramakrishna Math's branch in Madurai was started in 1987, and in 1998, Sri Ramakrishna Temple was consecrated here. Since then, Madurai Sri Ramakrishna Math is conducting many religious, educational, medical, and other welfare activities. This Math is now a 10-year child with a great vision at hand.

Annadanam Building: A Dining Hall to feed the devotees is under construction at Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madurai.

The Need: Many devotees from all over India and abroad visit Madurai throughout the year to have Darshan of Sri Meenakshi. They pass through Madurai and proceed on pilgrimage to Rameswaram, Kanyakumari, and other pilgrim places.

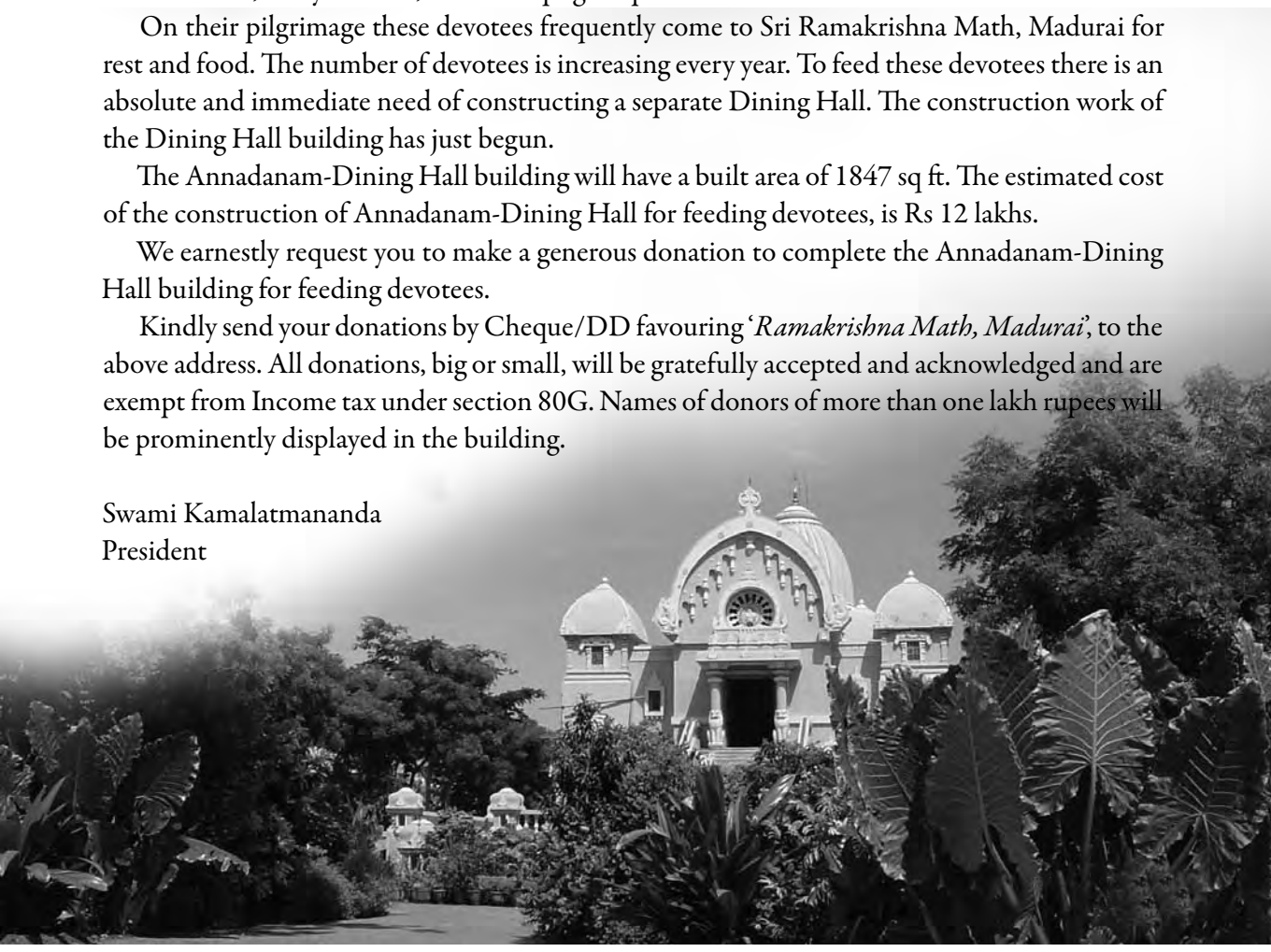
On their pilgrimage these devotees frequently come to Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madurai for rest and food. The number of devotees is increasing every year. To feed these devotees there is an absolute and immediate need of constructing a separate Dining Hall. The construction work of the Dining Hall building has just begun.

The Annadanam-Dining Hall building will have a built area of 1847 sq ft. The estimated cost of the construction of Annadanam-Dining Hall for feeding devotees, is Rs 12 lakhs.

We earnestly request you to make a generous donation to complete the Annadanam-Dining Hall building for feeding devotees.

Kindly send your donations by Cheque/DD favouring '*Ramakrishna Math, Madurai*', to the above address. All donations, big or small, will be gratefully accepted and acknowledged and are exempt from Income tax under section 80G. Names of donors of more than one lakh rupees will be prominently displayed in the building.

Swami Kamalatmananda
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